


AN OCEAN SECRET

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AN OCEAN SECRET



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"Lying upon his back was the body of a man, a white man, pinned to the deck by a knife through his throat."

AN OCEAN SECRET

BY

GUY BOOTHBY

AUTHOR OF

"DR. NIKOLA," "THE MYSTERY OF THE CLASPED HANDS,"
"A MILLIONAIRE'S LOVE STORY," "MY INDIAN QUEEN,"
"THE CURSE OF THE SNAKE," ETC., ETC.

WITH FRONTISPIECE BY E. FAIRHURST



LONDON

GEORGE BELL & SONS

1904

*This Edition is issued for circulation in India
and the Colonies only.*

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CHAPTER I

BLESS my soul, how clearly it all comes back to me! Years have gone by since all this happened, yet it is so fresh in my memory that it seems as if it were but yesterday. I've seen some curious things one way and another in my time, but I think my own love story is about the most curious of them all. I remember when I was only a scrap of a boy, I used to tell myself stories, and hoped that when my time should come to fall in love it would be in a romantic fashion. Little did I imagine how romantic it was destined to be. Have patience with me, and I will do my best to tell you about it. You must, however, remember that I'm not much of a fist with a pen. I'm better at doing a thing than writing about it. Let that be as it may, however, you shall have the story for what it is worth, and

then if it does not come up to expectations I shall, at least, have the satisfaction of having tried to do my best. More than that no man can do.

To begin with, let me say that I have been knocking about the world ever since I was a bit of a boy. As a matter of fact, I ran away from school in order to go to sea, and a precious hard time I had of it. I was twice wrecked before I was eighteen, and on the last occasion came very near to losing my life. However, that's neither here nor there. I didn't lose it, or I shouldn't be spinning this tale now. What do you think? But let us start fair and see what we can do.

From my earliest childhood I'm willing to confess that I always had a longing to visit the Southern Seas. So far as I was concerned it was "The Home of Romance," the World's Fairyland, in fact! I dreamt continually of enchanting Islands—of maidens more than fair—of pleasant sea fronts where the palm trees rustle their leaves and the sand upon the beaches is always warm, and the little waves creep in as if they are afraid that their noise will break the stillness and the general harmony.

Well, I put in eight years of that sort of

life, as you shall presently hear, and then I thought I'd earned a holiday. I wonder if you know what a holiday means to a man who has been working morning, noon, and night for eight long years. There's not much fun in it, I can assure you—the work, I mean, of course, not the holiday.

It was on the 23rd of July, never mind in what year, that I left Sydney in the sailing ship *Hullket*, bound for London *via* the Cape. What I was going to do in England when I got there I did not know, nor, I'm afraid, did I very much care. All my people, and by my people I mean my own immediate relatives, were dead, so that I could expect nothing in the way of amusement or hospitality from them. However, I had made up my mind to go, and go I accordingly did. I suppose Fate must have had some hand in the matter; at any rate, looking back at it now, I know that I could not have done a better thing to promote my own happiness. If you can manage to struggle through the yarn I've set myself to spin, you may or may not agree with me. I think you will, however, admit that I am right.

We were in the Doldrums—and if you want to know what boredom means try what they can do for you. A stagnant sea—without a

ripple—a surface smooth as glass, and not enough wind to make even a candle flame flicker, the sails hanging limp upon the yards, and the broiling sun beating down upon the decks till the very pitch bubbles in the seams. Never until that time did I realise the truth of Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner"—

"The very deep did rot: O Christ!
That ever this should be!
Yes, slimy things did crawl with legs,
Upon the slimy sea."

Taking one thing with another, I don't suppose there is anything more monotonous in this world than to lie, day after day, sluggishly rolling on what would otherwise be considered a smooth sea. No one seems to care to do anything save to loll in deck chairs and to pray for the breeze that does not come. Every amusement has long since palled, the bull-board knows not a single votary, while the quoit-peg stands neglected in the shadow of the companion hatch. It is a time when tempers are not to be trusted, when the smallest spark is sufficient to kindle a conflagration. We were not a particularly interesting company aft. The Skipper was a pompous little man, standing scarcely more than five foot two in his patent leather shoes, which he

wore even in the Tropics. He was a great martinet, and seemed to entertain the notion that so far as the other sex was concerned his charms were irresistible. He had one other failing, if by that word I may describe it, and that was an inordinate love of scent. The chief mate was a burly Scotchman, a good seaman, though somewhat too slow for my fancy. The second and third were decent young fellows, calling for no special description. The cuddy passengers numbered eight, including myself, an elderly Australian Squatter named Macpherson and his wife, who were visiting England after thirty years' absence; a Miss Pleyden, a lady about thirty years of age, who had been a governess in Melbourne, and who was going home to be married to a country parson, and whose photograph she carried continually about with her. (I heard afterwards, quite by chance, that the match never came to anything, he having married somebody else while she was on the High Seas). A frolicsome and rather pretty widow, with a daughter who looked almost as old as herself, gave a little life to the party, as I'll prove to you directly. There was also a young gentleman, with his tutor, who had gone out in the ship for his health. They call for no special remark, save that the tutor gave himself

insufferable airs upon the strength of his University experiences, and ruled his charge with a rod of iron. Early in the voyage he got it into his head that the fascinating widow was setting her cap at him, and as the Captain had developed a similar notion, we lookers-on prepared ourselves for an amusing Comedy. The two were quarrelling on every possible occasion, until we began to fear that the consequences might in the end be serious. The lady herself pretended to be unaware of the trouble she was causing, though it was easy for us to see that in reality she did not take the least interest in either of them, but was playing one off against the other for her own amusement. Having described the others to you, I suppose I should attempt to give you some notion of myself—plain John Bramwell at your service.

At this time I was just past my thirty-fifth birthday, stood about six feet in my socks, was not overburdened with good looks, and had been knocking about the world for more years than I cared to remember. I have already said that my parents were dead. My father had been a lawyer in a small country town, and I am sorry to say had not made much of a success of it. He was a delicate man, and my mother's death, which occurred three years

after I left home, proved such a blow to him that he never recovered from it, but eventually died, leaving me a hundred pounds, and just enough over to settle his debts and funeral expenses. After considerable delay the money was remitted to me in Australia, in which country I had just arrived from San Francisco. By this time I had got my second mate's certificate. Grieved as I naturally was at his death, the blow was somewhat softened by the knowledge that he had always been such an invalid, and that since my mother's death, he had taken little or no interest in his profession, or indeed in life itself.

As I had only signed in San Francisco for the voyage to Sydney, where I was to be superseded by one of the owner's sons, who had been left behind in hospital on the previous voyage, I began to cast about me for something to do. The pay I had saved would, I knew, keep me going for some little time, while I had the hundred pounds to invest, should anything turn up that I thought would suit me. But though there were plenty of schemes put before me, some of which I was assured would return me fifty per cent. on my capital, they were all too visionary, or to use a well-known mining phrase, "Too much of the

wild oat stamp," to suit my fancy. At last when my earnings were almost exhausted, I determined to bank what remained, and to get to work again, hoping to hear of something later on. I accordingly called at the office of my old firm, where I saw the chief partner, an exceedingly pleasant old gentleman, who in the past had shown me considerable kindness. He regretted exceedingly, he said, that he could find no opening for me. The market was over-stocked with officers just then, and, needless to say, I had no desire for any further experience of the "foc's'le."

I thanked him, and having bidden him good morning, was making for the door when he called me back.

"Stay, Mr. Bramwell, one moment," he said. "A thought has occurred to me which may or may not lead to something. Do you know the firm of Holland, Wilks & Co.?"

I answered to the effect that I was aware there *was* such a firm, but that I had never done business with them.

"Well, I remember Mr. Holland telling me early in the week that they are putting on a new schooner for the South Sea Trade. He wanted to know if I could recommend him a suitable mate. Had I known that you were disengaged, I would, of course, have mentioned

your name. Unfortunately, however, I did not know it. If you would care to call upon them and make enquiries, I shall be delighted to give you a letter of introduction. They are a good firm to work for, and if the berth is still vacant, I do not think under present circumstances that you could do much better. Shall I write you the letter? Then you can go round and see them at once!"

I thanked him warmly for his offer, which you will readily understand I was only too glad to accept. He accordingly wrote a note and handed it to me, whereupon I set off for the office in question. It proved to be an imposing place, and if the number of clerks employed and the expensiveness of the office fittings counted for anything, their business must have been a very considerable one. I enquired for Mr. Holland, and was informed by the dapper youth who waited on me, that he was out, but was expected back every minute. Fearing that if I went out again I might miss him, I said I would wait, and accordingly took a seat on a polished mahogany bench and fell to looking about me. As I am fond of watching and speculating as to the lives and characters of my fellow men, here was plenty of material to my hand. The grey

haired old man, patiently making entries in a large book at the desk immediately before me, had, in all probability, spent the greater part of his life with the firm. From the mere routine work upon which he was engaged, and his personal appearance, it was evident that he was without much capacity or ambition. The sporting-looking young gentleman next to him, with the flash tie and imitation diamond pin, checked shirt, and oiled hair, would, unless I were maligning him, possess a predilection for the sporting side of life—the racecourse, the theatre or the bar room. There was the young man with glasses and weak eyes, and a little nervous cough. His shoulders told their own tale. Then there was the higher grade; staid respectable men who spoke with authority, and who seemed to have the cares of Empire upon their shoulders. I was still watching them when the swing doors were pushed open and a little old gentleman, with a clean shaven red face peering out from under a pith helmet, trotted in. That he was someone of importance I gathered from the fact that the clerks went on with their work with extra zest immediately he appeared.

“Mr. Tompkins, Mr. Tompkins,” he cried in a sharp voice. “Where is Mr. Tompkins?”

One of the chief clerks immediately made

his appearance, whereupon the two entered into conversation in low tones across the counter. When they had finished, the little man trotted off down the passage and disappeared through a door at the further end. The youth who had interviewed me followed him and presently returned with the information that Mr. Holland would see me.

"So that was Mr. Holland, was it?" I said to myself as I followed my conductor in the same direction as that in which the old gentleman had proceeded.

I found him seated at a desk in a luxuriously appointed room.

"Good-morning, Mr. Bramwell," he said, after he had consulted a slip of paper on which the clerk had written my name. "What can I do for you?"

As he said this he put his head on one side and looked at me with such a comical expression that I could scarcely suppress a smile. I informed him of the nature of my errand and handed him the letter of introduction. He read it, and then placed it on the table before him.

"Happy to make your acquaintance," he said. "The berth is not filled up, and if your certificates are all right there is no reason why you shouldn't have it."

The upshot of the whole business was that when I left the office it was as mate of the schooner *Britomart*, with permission to join her as soon as I pleased. I did so that afternoon. She was a neat little craft, and excellently found. Her Skipper had been in the South Sea trade for more than twenty years, and knew the Islands inside and out. He was a quiet and very reserved man, and stood high in the estimation of his owners.

She also carried a super-cargo, a smart man, with, I should say, more than a touch of Yankee in him. There were eight hands forrard—nine with the Chinese cook.

When I reached her I found all hands hard at it getting the stores and trades aboard. I accordingly turned to with them. Next day we left Sydney for Apia.

With the exception of the voyage from San Francisco I had had no experience of the Islands, and the new life came to me as a revelation. The more I saw of it, the more I liked it. The constant change of scenery, the gentle, soft spoken people, the varied life and character that is to be continually met with, were all new to me. Our ship's company was a happy one, which, perhaps, had a good deal to do with it.

For the next two years I remained with the firm, feeling no desire to change my lot. Then something happened which was destined to exercise an important influence on my life. We were in Ponape, in the Carolines, when the disastrous event occurred. Judson, the purser, had been ashore on business, and, from what we were able to learn afterwards, had partaken freely of the hospitality of the place. Being anxious to rejoin the schooner as quickly as possible, he hoisted the sail of the boat that was bringing him off. The trade wind was blowing rather fresh and he was not more than fifty fathoms from the vessel when a sudden gust caught him. With deadly carelessness he had made his sheet fast, and as a natural result, before he could let go, the little craft had turned turtle. I was on deck at the time and saw it all. I immediately ordered a boat away, and went to his assistance, but I was too late to save him or his two companions. They had disappeared, and though we searched in every direction, no trace of them could we discover. This calamity cast a gloom over us all, particularly over the Skipper, who had been sincerely attached to the dead man. Fortunately we stood in no need of a supercargo on the return voyage to Sydney. There, however, a new man was appointed, for whom

I entertained a dislike from the moment I first set eyes on him. As it turned out this was reciprocated, and, before we had made our first port of call, I had determined that I would not sail with him again.

On reaching Apia, I went ashore as usual. It was a warm day, and eventually I found myself seated in the verandah of the principal hotel with a bottle of cool Pilsener at my elbow. I had not been there very long before a tall man, clad in immaculate white from head to foot, entered the verandah, and having given his order, seated himself near me, and lit a cigarette. He was a good-looking fellow, and evidently a gentleman. A close cropped beard and a moustache which curled upwards, gave him a somewhat rakish air, which added to, rather than detracted from, his somewhat uncommon personality. Taken altogether he was a man whom I would rather have for a friend than an enemy.

"It's very warm, isn't it?" he said as he sipped the drink he had ordered.

I replied in the affirmative, and poured myself out another glass.

"Forgive my impertinence," he continued, "but I am right in supposing, am I not, that you hail from the white schooner that came in this morning?"

Once more I answered in the affirmative, though I could not help wondering how he knew it, for to my knowledge I had never set eyes on him before. He laughed, his white teeth showing under his moustache as he did so.

“You are wondering how I knew it,” he continued. “Well, that’s very easily explained. My craft, the *Kittowake*, is lying almost alongside yours, and I saw you coming ashore. She is a pretty craft, yours—but I hope you won’t think me egotistical if I say that I prefer my own.”

He could certainly say this without any fear of contradiction, for his schooner was one of the most beautiful I had ever seen.

“Would you care to see her?” he asked, lighting another cigarette and speaking between the puffs of smoke. “If so, come off and lunch with me. I fancy you will say she repays inspection. After lunch we can talk business.”

I looked at him with surprise. What business could he have to talk with me about? Nevertheless, I accepted his invitation.

We left the hotel and strolled down to where his boat was waiting. She was in keeping with her owner and the schooner to which she belonged, and was manned by four Kanakas,

as trimly turned out as any English yacht's crew. We took our places, and at the signal from my companion, the oars fell into the water and we were off.

If you care to read on you will see how much that luncheon meant to me.

CHAPTER II

THE mysterious owner of the schooner *Kitto-wake* had spoken nothing but the truth when he had declared that his vessel would merit inspection. Personally, I had never seen anything like her before. Her tonnage must have been nearer five hundred than four, and her lines were perfect in their symmetry. For a top-sail schooner I thought she was somewhat heavily sparred, but when I came to know her better I had to admit that this was not the case. Her appointments were of the most approved pattern, and were in perfect condition.

“Let us come below,” said my companion, and forthwith led me to the cuddy, or perhaps I should say in this case, the saloon.

If I had been surprised by what I saw on deck, I was doubly so now. The saloon was a large one for a vessel in the South Sea trade,

but it was not that which surprised me so much as its fittings. As a matter of fact, it resembled an artistic man's study or studio more than a trading schooner's living apartment. The skylight was shaded with silk curtains; between the cabins, of which there were six, three on either side, were book-cases. There were several pictures, and right aft a cushioned lounge; a cool matting covered the floor, with two or three rugs strewn about. The dining table in the centre was oval in shape, and was now laid as if in preparation for a meal. The white napery and sparkling glass and silver looked vastly cool and inviting, I can assure you, after the glare outside.

"May I offer you a cool drink after our row?" asked my host, as he placed his hat on a small table.

Upon my accepting, he rang a small bell, which was immediately answered by a white robed China boy. Pilsener, icy cold, presently made its appearance.

"And now may we introduce ourselves to each other?" said my host. "I might set the example by explaining that my name is Farrington—Giles Farrington. I believe they do me the honour to give me some sort of reputation in these Seas."

I could not repress a little start of astonishment. So this man was none other than the famous Giles Farrington, of whom I had heard so many stories since my coming to the South Seas. Nobody seemed to know quite who or what he was, though many people had pretended to be well informed. It was said that he never settled down anywhere, but that he made his yacht his home, roaming about from island to island as the fancy took him. That he was wealthy would seem to be a fact that admitted of no dispute. Indeed, he could not have lived in the style he did unless such had been the case. It was another of his peculiarities that he had no friends, also that he had never been known to speak to a woman. To balance this, folk who pretended to know averred that he was worshipped by his crew, who at the same time feared him more than anyone else on earth.

“Ah! I see you have heard of me,” he continued, with another of his peculiar smiles. “I wonder why it is that people put themselves to such trouble to discuss the doings of folk they have probably never seen, or will probably never see, in their lives. I have heard the most extraordinary stories about myself. At

one time it was confidently asserted that I was none other than the redoubtable Bully Hayes. I have been told that by popular report I live by piracy, and slave dealing, by opium smuggling, and half a dozen other artistic phases of villainy. It seems hard that, because I happen to have a craving for solitude, and a distaste for the society of my average fellow man, I should not be allowed to pursue my way in peace. But see, here is tiffin, shall we sit down to it, Mr. Bramwell?"

"So you are acquainted with my name?" I asked, wondering how he could have become aware of it.

"Perfectly," he answered, as we took our places at the table. "Have I not just given you proof of it? It was on purpose to see you, and to ask you to lunch with me to-day, that I went ashore this morning."

"I am afraid I must confess to a feeling of some surprise that you should have heard of me," I answered. "I had no idea that I was such an important person."

"You underrate yourself," was his reply. "To my thinking that is as much a fault as overweening conceit, for in either case you give the world a false impression of your ability. Won't you let me give you some of

this salad? I think you will like it, it is from a recipe of my own."

The salad certainly was delicious, but what I wanted to know was, first, how he had heard of me, and second, why he had invited me to lunch. That it was merely to make my acquaintance I did not for a moment believe. He must have gathered what was passing in my mind, for he laughed softly.

"I can see you are still puzzled," he observed. "In that case we will not have any mystery about it, it really is a very simple matter after all. To begin with, I heard of you some years ago from your first Skipper, later on from your present Skipper, and a few days since from Mr. Holland of Sydney, in whose employ I believe you now are. So you see it is a question of hey presto! and the elements of romance vanish. It is rather a pity that a magician should ever be called upon to tell how he does his tricks."

The explanation was certainly simple, but I had still to find out what his reason was for inviting me to lunch with him. I did not like to press him, however, feeling sure he would tell me all that was necessary in good time.

Our meal, which was a masterpiece of culinary art and which might very well have been the work of some famous French chef, being at an end, my host produced cigars, and proposed that we should go on deck, where he thought we should find it cooler under the awning. He made a fine figure of a man as he lay stretched out in his long chair, his head thrown back, and his cigar between his lips. There was an impression of latent strength about him that could scarcely fail to impress the beholder. I found myself wondering, as so many other people had wondered before me, what his real history was, and what it was that had made him lead the life he did. Thinking over this, I allowed my cigar to go out, and felt in my pockets for a match wherewith to light it again. To my annoyance, I discovered that I had not put my match box in my pocket that morning. He saw my dilemma and produced his own, which he handed to me. It was of plain silver, unchased, and ornamented only with a small crest, two hands upholding a sword, if I remember right. Having set my cigar going again, I handed the match box back to him, making a mental note of what I had discovered upon it, in case I should ever

be able to gain some clue from it as to his identity.

“And now, Mr. Bramwell, I won’t test your patience any longer,” he said at last. “Let us therefore get to business. I was given to understand by Mr. Holland in his letter that there is a possibility of your leaving his employment. Is that so?”

“There is certainly the possibility,” I answered, “but whether it is probable I shall do so must of course depend very much on circumstances. If the truth must be confessed, the super-cargo and I don’t contrive to hit it off very well together. It may be my fault, though I don’t think it is. Mr. Holland seemed inclined when I spoke to him on the matter to take his side. In consequence, things, since we left Sydney, have gone steadily from bad to worse.”

“Under such circumstances I should say that you could not do better than leave the employ. That is exactly what I wanted to see you about. As a matter of fact, if you want a change of service, I am prepared to offer you the post of mate on board this boat on better pay than you are at present receiving. You would be comfortable, I think, and for many

reasons I don't think you would regret the change."

This offer was so entirely unexpected that, for a moment, I scarcely knew what to say.

"It is very good of you to pay me the compliment," I observed at last, "but I hardly know what answer to give you until I have heard a little more about it. May I ask who your Skipper is?"

"Myself," was his reply. "The second mate is a very obliging young fellow, named Rathway, with whom I am sure you would get on."

"And your cruises? I hope you will not object to giving me some information, as of course I very naturally want to know how I stand. I have no one to consider but myself, nevertheless I don't want to get myself into any more troubles than I can possibly avoid."

"But you like a spice of adventure, I suppose?" the other enquired with a smile. "You look that sort of fellow, or I am mistaken in my man."

"Oh, I like a bit of adventure well enough," I said with a laugh. "You need have no fear on that score. But there are different kinds of

adventures. The burglar may call breaking into a house by that name, or the garrotter, but that's not the kind of thing I care about."

"Very naturally! But it is not my intention to offer you any amusements of that description. Now look here, Bramwell, I like your face, and I have heard you well spoken of. If I tell you straight out what you would have to do with me, will you give me your word of honour not to repeat it, should you decide not to accept my offer? I shall to a certain extent, or I might even say to a very large extent, be putting myself in your power, and as you will see for yourself I shall have no sort of hold upon you, save your word."

I thought for a moment before I replied. My curiosity was excited, and I did not see how I could come to any harm by giving him the promise he asked of me.

"Very well," I said. "I will give you my word of honour not to repeat anything you may care to say to me. I should not have done so in any case, but if the promise will make you feel more secure, you are most welcome to it."

"I thank you," was his answer. "And now let me endeavour to give you some notion of

the way in which I spend my time. You admit that you have heard more than one story about me. The only one which has any pretence to truth is that connected with the opium smuggling. I am quite prepared to admit that I have tried my hand at it on more than one occasion, and very well it has paid too, but it is a risky business. However, it is an accepted fact that one must not look for big profits unless one is prepared to take a corresponding amount of risk. Have you any objection to opium smuggling? Of course, provided always that it is made worth your while."

"Well, there seems to be a sort of prejudice against it," I answered, with a laugh. "The penalty, I believe, is a heavy one if you are caught."

"Yes, but, my friend, one must not allow oneself to be caught. That's exactly where people make the mistake. I could tell you tales dealing with the subject that I don't suppose you would credit. Then again there is pearl poaching in prohibited waters, which can be turned to most profitable account if you know how to pull the strings. I know of one particular patch where at this moment there must be at least fifty thousand pounds'

worth of pearls and shell, only waiting to be exploited by the man who is prepared to run the necessary risk. Any objection to pearl poaching?"

"There's another name for it, isn't there," I rejoined.

He laughed good humouredly and started a fresh cigar.

"My dear fellow," he said, "when all is said and done, you are not hurting anybody. You are only helping yourself to what a ridiculous Government will not make use of. I have known some of the most honest men in the world, who would not scruple to defraud the Government in the matter of their Income Tax, yet would consider it a crime to take a cigar out of another man's case unasked. Then there's yet another little way of employing your time, which is probably the most fascinating and best paying of all. You are aware that there is a certain Island, not more than half the world removed from here, which is the property of a Foreign Government, and to which certain persons whose citizenship is no longer desired by an ungrateful country are deported."

"You refer, of course, to New Caledonia?"

"You have guessed the place exactly. A

fine country, but not appreciated by a portion of its inhabitants. They hunger for a change of scene, and in many cases they possess influential friends who are willing to pay good round sums to enable them to obtain it. You would scarcely believe that there is risk even in that."

"On the contrary, I can quite believe it. I should say it was just about as risky, if not more so, than either of the others you have mentioned."

"You are very hard to please," he went on, puffing at his cigar. "Now what do you say? Are you prepared to go into it? I am willing to pay you well as I said just now."

Here he mentioned the amount which, as it does not concern this story, I will, with your permission, omit. It was certainly a tempting offer, and since he was there to tell the tale, it was very evident that he knew what he was doing. I don't suppose, had any of my family been living, I should have had anything to do with it, but as I have already told you, I was alone in the world, with no one to think of but myself. Moreover, I did not think, for reasons already given, of continuing any longer in my present service.

"Yes, I think I'll try it," I said. "But I must see the Skipper first, for I have no desire to leave him in the lurch."

"Oh, you needn't be afraid of that," was his rejoinder. "If I am not mistaken he has another man in his eye already."

That decides matters.

"In that case, you can count on me. If you will let one of your men put me across I will see him at once, and then come back and let you know. When will you want to sail?"

"Early to-morrow morning, if possible," he said. "I have got no time to waste. We have a delicate little bit of business to pull off, and it is imperative that there should be no delay on our part. Go over and see your Skipper, and after that we will go into details more explicitly."

I did as he suggested, discovered that he was right, and when the necessary matters had been arranged, and I had collected my traps, returned to the *Kittowake*, which was destined to be my home for some long time to come.

As the recital of my adventures during the time that I remained in her is only leading up to the strange story I have to tell, and time and space both press, I will be as brief

as possible. Mr. Farrington had certainly not done himself or me injustice when he had promised me plenty of adventures. During the years I was with him I certainly had enough of them and to spare. Some day I shall probably make them into a book, and let the world judge of what such a life may mean. Farrington, whatever else may be said of him, was a born strategist. His plans were so ably conceived, and so admirably carried out, that they almost defied detection, while his personality was such a decided one, and his power so great of keeping other people in the right sort of humour with him, and yet under control, that there was very little danger of his being the victim of treachery. As will be seen from this, his was a curious character, the most complex I think that I have ever met.

A long time elapsed before I began to think even that I understood him, and when I did, I found I was on the wrong tack altogether. He was of the gentlest, and yet one of the most passionate, of men ; quick to take offence, yet quicker still to admit himself in the wrong, if he thought he had been unjust. Incapable of fear for himself, he was strangely enough always, in moments of danger, nervous for the others. As somebody had said some-

where, he was contradiction itself contradicted. What might he not have been under other circumstances?

At last when we had been together for several years, and I had begun to grow weary, I summoned up sufficient courage to tell him that I was tired of the life, and that I felt in need of a holiday. I had made and saved a considerable sum of money, and was determined to take a trip to the Old Country to see the home of my boyhood and my parents' grave. He heard me out patiently, but I could see that my decision had cut him to the heart.

"Well, of course, if you feel that you must go," he said, "I suppose you must. It would be no use my attempting to detain you, but I'd give anything to induce you to change your mind. We have got on famously together. We have done some big things, and I shall never be able to find another to take your place."

"But why don't you come, too?" I asked. "You want a change as much as I do, and who knows but what I shall tire of it, and then we could both come back, and possibly pick up the old life again."

He only shook his head.

"No," he answered. "I have no desire to

see England again. It never does to cross an old trail. The recollections she would conjure up would open all the old sores, and I have no wish for that. Go away, my friend; enjoy yourself, and if by any chance you *should* tire of it, and no woman traps you into matrimony, communicate with me through the old channel and we'll go back to the old life once more, and forget you'd ever been away."

A fortnight later he dropped me in Honolulu, and next morning from the deck of the steamer that was to carry me to Sydney I saw the *Kittowake* leaving the harbour under full sail. Only then did I realise what a big part Farrington had played in the last few years of my life, and how much I missed him.

The day following my arrival in Sydney I booked my passage aboard the *Hullket* for London, as I told you in my first chapter. She was a fine roomy old ship, and as I was in no way pressed for time, and had no desire to travel by a crack mailboat, with a floating hotel full of passengers, I had not the least objection to making my passage in a sailing ship. Had anyone told me that that commonplace decision was to be the means of eventually bringing Farrington and me to-

gether again, I should certainly have refused to believe such a statement.

And yet if you have patience to read on you will see that it was so, and under the strangest circumstances.

CHAPTER III

AT the commencement of my first chapter I described to you the miserable effect of a calm in the Doldrums, and how depressed our ship's company were made by it. More than once I had bitterly regretted that I had not trusted myself to steam, but it was no use crying over spilt milk, I had only myself to thank for my folly, so, whether I liked it or not, there was nothing for it but to put up with the stifling heat under the awning, and the still greater Inferno of my cabin below. All the energy seemed to have gone out of me, and I had not sufficient life left in me even to light a pipe. Stranger still, so listless did both feel, that the tutor and the Captain forebore, for the time being at least, to quarrel. The widow was lying down in the saloon with what she described as a sick headache. The delicate youth, whose name by the way was Thompson, was fast asleep in the shadow of the companion, with old Mr. Macpherson in the same condition

in a long chair beside him. Miss Pleyden was endeavouring to write up her diary, and was not succeeding in the attempt. Even the man at the wheel looked half asleep, indeed, the only sounds to be heard were the music of the somnolent gentlemen, and the clattering of pots and pans in the galley forrard. What the heat must be like in there I dared not think. The infernal regions would have been nothing to it.

After a while I went forrard to the foc's'le head to see if there was any air to be obtained there, but I might have saved myself the trouble, for the atmosphere was as stagnant in the bows as it was aft. Not an inch of canvas was drawing, we might as well have been at anchor for all the progress we were making. I was proceeding aft once more, when a man who had been lying in the shadow of the long boat on the main deck sat up and accosted me.

"There doesn't seem any chance of a breeze, sir," he said. "It is enough to drive a man off his head, this broiling sun. You don't know what it's like, sir, down below. How the women and children stand it, fairly beats me. I can't manage it myself even."

He was one of the few steerage passengers we carried, and seemed to be a decent sort of

fellow. Like myself, he had been at sea; later on he had tried his luck on the Australian gold-fields, and, having had the good fortune to "strike it" fairly rich, was now going home to settle down in his native place. I had always liked the man, and we had had many talks together during the voyage. Though he was wont to profess his hatred of the sea, and to vow that once he got ashore he would never go afloat again, I did not altogether believe him. When I talked to him about it his eyes were wont to light up at the sound of the familiar terms, until by-and-bye he would forget himself in his excitement, would slap his leg and vow that, under certain conditions, it wasn't such a bad life after all. My reasons for telling you all this will be apparent to you presently.

We discussed the weather, and then I continued my walk aft, to find the two sleepers awake and the widow walking languidly up and down the deck with the Captain, while her other swain watched them from his chair with angry eyes. Strolling to the taffrail I looked over. As I did so, a big black fin made its appearance. It belonged to a shark, and it was evident that he was following us up in the hopes of a meal. I don't know what has caused me to feel so, but I have always

had the same sort of aversion for a shark that other people entertain for a snake or a rat. I could not help shuddering as I watched him sneaking along just below the surface, ready to grab at anything, human or otherwise, that might be thrown to him. The memory of a native I had once seen mauled by one of the brutes rose before my mind's eye. It was in the Fijis, and Farrington had been present at the time. He would have leapt in to the poor wretch's assistance, had I not, realising that it was hopeless, prevented him by main force. I recalled also the way in which he had abused me for not permitting him to carry out his wish. Then I began to wonder what he was doing, and whether he ever thought of me. While I was indulging in this reverie the sun was sinking like a ball of fire below the horizon, throwing a streak of blood-red light across the glassy sea. An indefinable feeling of loneliness had taken possession of me, a vague belief that something was about to happen, what I knew not. Try how I would I could not shake it off, indeed, so much was I out of harmony with my surroundings, that I could have found it in my heart to curse the frivolous widow and the foppish little Captain for the twaddle they were chattering. In the hope of cheering myself up a little, I went

below and ordered the steward to bring me a bottle of beer, but it was hot and well-nigh undrinkable, so I left it and returned to the deck once more. In the Tropics there is no dusk, and, though I had only been absent a short time, the shadows of night had commenced to fall. Better still, there was just the faint suspicion of a breeze, if only it would continue.

“This is better, sir,” said the second officer, whose watch it was. “I fancy, from the look of the sky, that there’s more behind it.”

“Let us hope so,” I replied, “for I have had enough of calms to last me a life time.” Then seeing that the Captain was watching us, and knowing that he objected to the passengers conversing with his officers, when on duty, I made an excuse and strolled away.

The glorious tropic stars were showing up one by one by this time, and my imagination led me to believe that the breeze really was increasing. After the languor of the day, the ripple of the water alongside was more than soothing, while to see the canvas steadily drawing was as good, if not better, than a draught of the rarest wine. At dinner that night everyone seemed to be in good spirits. Old Macpherson told some of his racy Australian stories of the Early Days, while even

lackadaisical little Miss Pleyden ventured on a timid riddle, of which it eventually appeared she had forgotten the answer. Seeing her confusion, and that the Captain was about to chaff her, I came to her assistance by asking him what the latter thought of the chances of the wind holding. He glared spitefully at me as if he were anxious to know what the deuce the matter had got to do with me. But I could see from the way that he looked at the tell-tale compass above his head that he was more concerned about it even than we were. Dinner over I returned to the deck and went aft to take a squint over the rail. In my opinion she was doing a good nine-and-a-half, but the officer of the watch thought scarcely so much. The wake was a mass of phosphorescent light that trailed away like star-spangled cotton wool hundreds of yards behind us. Never do I remember to have seen it more beautiful than it was that night. The better to enjoy it and also to escape from my fellow-passengers, for whose company I did not feel in the least inclined, I once more went forward into the bows, and posted myself near the look-out to think my own thoughts with only the churning of the water under the vessel's fore foot to keep me company. It was nearly ten o'clock before I roused myself

from my reverie, knocked the ashes out of my pipe upon the rail, and made my way back to my own proper portion of the ship. After one last look round, I dived into the brilliantly-lighted cuddy where the Captain and Mr. Macpherson were sitting over their grog. Feeling that they might deem me unsociable if I did not, I poured myself out a glass and joined them.

"I am glad you have come to protect me, Mr. Bramwell," began the Captain, who evidently desired to make up for his curt treatment of me earlier in the evening. "Mr. Macpherson has been nearly frightening me to death with ghost stories and tales of second sight. I shall be afraid to go on deck all night if he continues much longer."

Like most Scotchmen, the Squatter was exceedingly superstitious.

"You don't believe, then, in such things?" I asked, more for the sake of something to say than for any interest I took in the discussion.

"Believe it? I should think not," replied the little man, stoutly. "You'll be wanting me to believe in dreams next."

"Well, well, and you might do worse than that," replied the older man, shaking his head. "I can call to mind now an old shepherd I had early in the Seventies—Sandy Macgreggor

was his name ; he had a hut out in the Back Country, and, taken altogether, he was a verra curious man, d'ye ken. One morning I rode out to inspect his sheep. He was mortal glad to see me, for he was fair fashed about a dream he'd had that night."

The old man stopped to mix himself another glass of grog. Having done so with proper deliberation, he continued :—

"What the man had dreamt was that he had seen himself lying dead alongside the Stockyard rails at the Head Station, and that one of the hands, a young gowk that I had sent about his business a fortnight before was the first to find him there. 'Then, ye can set your mind at rest, Sandy, my lad,' said I. 'For if ye don't die till yer see young Peter Wall on my property again, ye'll live to be as old as Methuselah.' That cheered him up a bit, but listen ye to the sequel. Mind ye, it's gospel truth I'm telling ye. A year afterwards, to the very day, Sandy came riding into the Head Station for some dingo traps he wanted. His horse was a young one, and the old man wasn't much of a rider. Half a mile from the Head Station an emu jumped up from behind a bush and gave the beastie such a fright that he bolted, dashed into the Stockyard fence and broke poor Sandy's neck.

The man who picked him up was young Peter Wall, who'd just turned up to know if I'd give him another chance at the shearing. Now, how d'ye account for that?"

"It's a very pretty story," said the Captain rudely, but with the air of a man who is not quite certain of the truth of what he is saying.

"Ye dinna doubt my word?" asked the old man angrily, relapsing into his broad Scotch in his excitement. "I tell ye it's the sober truth!"

The Captain, however, would not take the hint, but must needs go blundering on in the same foolish fashion. I seized the first opportunity to interpose between them, and after a few moments had succeeded in smoothing the ruffled plumes of both parties. Then bidding them "good-night," I made my way to my berth. My port was open, and from the steady swish outside, I could tell that the breeze was still continuing. Then I turned into bed, and almost before my head had touched my pillow, was asleep. But if I had thought I was going to have a good night, I was never more mistaken in my life. As a rule I don't dream very much, not having the requisite imagination, I suppose. On this particular night, however, I was treated to about the worst nightmare I have ever known. Possibly the talk I had

heard just prior to turning in may have had something to do with it. I can't say anything about that. I only know that I believed I was kneeling down beside the body of a dead man, who had been stabbed through the throat, and whose terrible eyes looked up into mine with such a stare that my very blood ran cold in my veins. Where it was that I had found him, or who he was, I could not say, I was only conscious of the ghastly face and of that horrible wound in which the knife still remained embedded. Then a woman's face rose before me—a beautiful face, with dark lustrous eyes, with the light of madness, or at least of despair, in them. She held out her hands to me as if imploring me to help her, to save her from something, I could not tell what. I tried to question her, but I was tongue-tied. Then her face vanished as the body of the murdered man had done, and I woke to find myself bathed with perspiration, and trembling like a frightened child. Leaping from my bunk, I lit my swinging lamp, and tried to pull myself together. I had slept for longer than I supposed, for on consulting my watch I found that it was eight bells (twelve o'clock).

“I can't stay down here,” I said to myself. “I'll put on some clothes and go on deck. The fresh air may possibly drive the remem-

brance of that infernal dream out of my head."

I carried out my plan, and reached the deck just as the watch was being relieved, and in time to come into violent collision with the man who was going aft to the wheel. I think his cheerful "hold up, sir, you're all right," did me more good than anything else could have done. I immediately straightened myself up and walked aft. To my dismay I found that the breeze had entirely died away, and that the vessel was once more almost at a standstill. Ill-luck seemed to pursue us. Lighting a pipe, I began to stomp the deck as if it were my watch. Over the side the stars were reflected in the dark water like countless millions of jewels strewn upon black velvet, while the phosphorus gleamed in our wake like millions of fairy electric lamps. My mind was in a whirl, and do what I would I could not bring it to its bearings. As for returning to my cabin I felt that that was out of the question. I could not have laid myself down to sleep again in that stifling place for all the money in the world. Under the circumstances I determined to remain on deck, at least until daylight. On such a night this was no hardship.

Between two and three the Skipper made his

appearance for a look round. He made a comical little figure, clad as he was in a suit of dandy pyjamas, his uniform cap on his head, and a pair of Chinese grass slippers on his feet. He saw me and came across to where I was standing.

“Find your cabin too hot, Mr. Bramwell?” he began, then without waiting for me to answer, added, “wind all gone again, I see. It’s what I thought would happen, it’s enough to make a Saint swear.” Then after a glance into the binnacle, he dived below once more, leaving me to my vigil.

It was not until four o’clock that the first signs of day were to be observed. Then the stars in the East began slowly to pale, those in other parts of the heavens gradually followed their example, while a mysterious grey light spread over the sea, changing in its turn from grey to lilac, from lilac to purple, and then suddenly to blood-red as the sun rose above the horizon. In the bright morning light the ship looked wondrously beautiful, the sun’s rays caught the brasswork and lit it up until it shone like burnished gold. The canvas aloft had taken to itself a faint flush, while even the water with which the watch was washing down, sparkled as it ran into the scuppers,

and creamed like champagne when it got there.

Going below I procured a towel and went out on the main deck for a bath, after which I dressed and returned to the poop. On reaching it I found the officer of the watch peering at something on the port bow through his glass. I crossed to him and asked him what he saw.

"Take a look for yourself," he answered.

I took the glass, and steadying it on the rail, gazed through it in the direction indicated. At first I could pick nothing up—after a moment's search, however, I found what looked like the masts of a vessel. She had no sails set, but, being hull down, she might have been a steamer for aught we could tell to the contrary.

"If she is," said the mate, "we shall lose sight of her in a few minutes. I've been watching her for some time, but slowly as we are travelling, there is no doubt we are overhauling her."

At this moment one of the stewards made his appearance with coffee and biscuits, and, for the time being, the question of the craft we had been watching dropped out of discussion.

By this time the men had finished their work on the main deck and were coming up

the poop, so to avoid a ducking I took a glass from the companion and went forward to the foc's'le head in order to discover whether the stranger had vanished from our sight. This time there could be no doubt that we had overhauled her. Her hull was now visible, and, from what I could make out at the distance she was away from us, she was a brig of, roughly computed, between two or three hundred tons. But what puzzled me more than anything about her was that she had not a stitch of canvas set, and in a part of the ocean where it is necessary to crack on everything that will catch a capful of wind. She was heading the same way as ourselves. I remained for upwards of an hour watching her, and then returned aft.

"What do you make of her now?" I asked the mate, who had again been examining her through his glass.

"Blest if I know what to think," he replied. "She don't look like a derelict, and yet, in the name of all that's wonderful, what's she doing under bare poles out here? To look at her you'd think she was at anchor."

Half an hour later we were within a few miles of her, and we were able to distinguish her quite easily. She proved to be what I had said—a brig of about three hundred tons,

a compact little craft, and, as far as we could judge, as sound as a bell. Yet, as we both had noticed, her sails were all furled.

"I think I will inform the Skipper," said the officer, and going to the companion he called the steward and gave him the necessary instructions.

In a few minutes the little man had joined us, and was examining the stranger for himself.

"There's something very strange about it," he said, after a prolonged look. "I can't make it out at all."

"What will you do, sir?" I enquired.

"I've a good mind to send a boat to have a look at her. It won't delay us very long, and I should like to solve the mystery. Take the quarter boat, Mr. Jackson, and overhaul her. Don't be any longer than you can help, and be sure you don't run any risks."

"Aye, aye, sir," replied the mate, and went forward to give the orders.

"Have you any objection to my accompanying him, Captain?" I asked, for having been one of the first to sight her, I felt a strange curiosity to visit the vessel.

"Not in the least, if you wish to do so," he replied.

By the time we were within half a mile of

the brig, the quarter boat was ready for lowering. This done, Jackson and I took our places in her, and, pulled by four men, set off to visit the stranger.

Without knowing it, I was entering upon a new phase of my career, and one which, as you will see, was destined to bring about the most extraordinary results.

CHAPTER IV

You may be sure that as we approached the brig both the mate and I examined her with curious eyes. For my own part I expected to find that she had been abandoned either as being unseaworthy or because there had been a fire on board, which had burned itself out after the departure of the crew. This theory, however, did not suit my companion.

“If she were unseaworthy she would probably have gone to the bottom ere this,” he asserted; “and they wouldn’t have taken the trouble to furl everything before saying ‘Good-bye’ to her. If, on the other hand, there had been a fire of sufficient violence to cause them to leave her, the same argument applies. Men don’t go aloft to handle canvas when the flames are raging, they’d be much better employed victualling and getting out their boats.”

“Then what is your opinion of the matter?” I asked.

"Mutiny," he answered. "That's my reading of it. The crew have mutinied and cleared out. Probably chucked the old man and the mates overboard, and then gone off in the boats. For, if you look, you will see that they are missing."

"Yes," I continued, "I admit that they are missing, but in the case of a mutiny would they have furled everything before leaving her, or would they have left her at all? My opinion is they would have scuttled her instead of allowing her to parade the seas as evidence against them."

By this time we were not more than fifty yards from the vessel's side.

"Vast pulling," said the mate to his men, and then standing up he funnelled his mouth with his hands and shouted, "Ship ahoy! What brig is that?" But he received no answer.

"As I thought," he said; "she is abandoned—and yet she looks sound enough. Before we go aboard let's have a look at her name."

To our astonishment the name on both bows had been carefully painted out.

"Hullo! That looks fishy," remarked the mate. "Let's see if it is on her counter."

We accordingly pulled astern, only to meet

with the same result. Here the name had not only been painted out, but scraped out.

“Still more fishy,” said the mate. “Bring her alongside men.”

They did so, and the pair of us clambered on board. At first glance she appeared to be a roomy, comfortable boat, with a poop and a small house forrard, just abaft the foremast. Everything was as trim and ship-shape as the heart of any seaman could desire; but sign of a boat, there was none. The short ladders to the poop had brass rails and fittings, and from the way in which they sparkled in the rays of the sun, it was evident that whatever the mystery might be, it was of recent date.

Before going aft we thought we would explore the crew's quarters. We accordingly entered the house with the purpose of exploring the bunks, of which there were eight. They were, however, empty—not a blanket or a vestige of clothing was to be found. The very floor, in such places usually so filthy, had been so carefully swept.

“Nothing to be discovered here,” remarked the mate, who was evidently enjoying the mystery. “Now we'll try the galley.”

And thither we repaired. Here everything

was in the same apple-pie order. The stove was even polished, the pots and pans and other kitchen utensils were clean, and in their proper places. Again there was proof that the vessel had not been long abandoned, for a kitchen clock suspended on the wall was still going.

“Before we go aft let’s take a glimpse at the forepeak. It’s just possible we may drop on something there that will give us a clue as to her identity.”

Lighting a lantern we found in the galley, we made our way into the place in question, but it told us no more than we had yet discovered. There was nothing there save some spare canvas and the usual items of ships’ chandlery.

“Well, this gets more mysterious every minute,” I said, as I replaced the lantern in the galley. “Now let’s go aft.”

We did so, and ascended to the poop. The companion was only a small one, but before descending to the cuddy we determined to look about on deck.

“Very possibly her name is on the wheel,” I said. “Let’s examine it.”

We passed round the hatch with the intention of doing so. The mate was a few steps in advance of me—suddenly I heard him

utter a cry, followed by a muttered "Good God!"

"What's the matter?" I asked, and hastened forward to satisfy myself. Merciful powers, it was not to be wondered at that he had cried out. I did so myself, a moment later. Stretched out upon the deck was the most gruesome sight I have ever seen in all my experience. Lying upon his back was the body of a man, a white man, pinned to the deck by a knife through his throat. His arms were extended, and they also were pinned in the same fashion through the palms. The eyes were open, and stared up at us with nameless horror. So terrifying was the sight that I reeled, and believe I should have fallen, had not the mate caught me in time.

"What's the matter?" he asked, in a voice that I scarcely recognised.

"It is too horrible," was all that I could say, for, for the sake of his opinion of my sanity, I dared not tell him that it was the face of the man whom I had seen in my dream of the previous night. "It's too horrible," I repeated, then feeling that I must say something more, I added, "What can it mean?"

"Something very bad, as you can see for yourself," was his reply. "There has evidently been terrible work aboard this ship within the last twenty-four hours. How long should you say that man has been dead?"

"Not more than twenty-four hours at the utmost," I answered, after another shuddering glance at the corpse. "Think of the sun yesterday."

He saw the significance of my words.

"What do you think is best to be done?"

"The very best thing, I should think, would be for you to go back and tell the Skipper what we have discovered. Persuade him, if you can, to come and see for himself, so that it may be properly logged. One can't be too careful in a matter like this. Meanwhile, I'll look round and see what else I can discover."

He saw the wisdom of my advice, and took his departure, promising to be as quick as possible on his errand.

As soon as he had taken his departure I hurried forward to the peak and procured thence a fair-sized bit of canvas, with which I hastened aft. Once I had covered the body with it I felt happier, but even then I seemed to see those terrible eyes staring through it

at me. The very remembrance of the face was sufficient to make a man sick with loathing of himself, and what he may possibly come to. Passing to the wheel I examined it carefully. It was easily seen that it had once borne the name of the vessel, but that the word or words had been carefully scraped away was evident from the marks upon the wood. Lifebuoys there were none, so far as I could discover, indeed, everything pointed to the fact that the greatest care and ingenuity had been displayed in concealing all traces of the identity of the unhappy vessel. That the murderers, whoever they may have been, had not plundered the vessel, seemed evident, for the reason that at the top of the companion, on a rack, were two excellent glasses, and an expensive barometer.

I descended the narrow ladder and entered the small cuddy. It was but a tiny place, being mainly taken up with a small pantry and six equally small cabins. There was a table in the centre, with benches on either side, and a swing tray above the former under the skylight. The latter was well filled with glasses, and also held a decanter of rum, which apparently had not been touched. In the pantry, as in the galley and the men's

quarters, everything was the model of neatness.

Before going further I searched the drawers of the small dresser and the cupboard underneath, but could only find a number of plates, a box of knives, and a small few odds and ends that told me nothing. The crockery was of the most ordinary description, and, though the knives had the name of a Sheffield maker upon them, they did nothing to help me. From the pantry I proceeded to the first of the cabins on the port side. It was as empty as the men's quarters; so was the next, save for a pair of chronometers, a sextant, and other nautical instruments upon a shelf. The fact that these should have been left behind puzzled me considerably, unless, as I was constrained to argue, one of the mates had been concerned in the business, and had taken his own instruments with him. I then tried the next. As there was nothing there to throw any further light upon the mystery, I left it and crossed the cuddy to its fellow on the starboard side. Nothing there; I passed on to the next. This one proved to be locked. I turned the handle violently, but without result.

"Perhaps we have got the key to it all in here," I said to myself, and then debated

whether I should apply my shoulder to it and burst the lock. I was still pondering the subject, when to my amazement a low moan reached me from within. It was so unexpected that I stepped back a pace as if someone had struck me. Then recovering myself, I endeavoured to look through the keyhole, but could see nothing inside save the end of a bunk, which, as may be supposed, was of no sort of use to me. Hoping to ascertain who, or what, was inside, I rapped loudly upon the panels of the door, but the only answer I received was another moan. That it was a woman's voice I had heard I was convinced, but what was she doing locked in there, in a cabin of a deserted ship, with a body of a murdered man stretched upon the deck above. That she was alive, the moan that I had heard was sufficient testimony.

At last, having given the matter some thought, I determined not to take any action until the Skipper, or at least the mate, should arrive. In a case such as this, one could scarcely have too many witnesses. I accordingly passed on to the adjoining and last cabin. This one, like its companion across the way, was empty. So feeling I had done all I could for the present, I made my way up to the deck,

heartily wishing myself out of the whole matter.

My search must have taken longer than I supposed, for when I reached the poop, it was to find the Captain's gig approaching the brig, and the Skipper himself seated beside the mate in the stern sheets.

"From what Mr. Jackson has told me, this appears to be a bad business," said the former when he reached the deck.

"I am afraid it is," I replied. "An uncommonly bad business. That was why I suggested to Mr. Jackson asking you to come over."

"Well, show me what there is to be seen, and let's be done with the matter," he answered. "I am not fond of these little affairs!"

Without answering I led him to the spot which I had covered with canvas—drawing this aside I showed him what lay below. As we had done, he uttered an exclamation of horror, and I give you my word I do not wonder at it. The whole thing was so brutal, so villainous, that no one could have looked at it unmoved.

"Cover it up again," he said, "I don't want to see any more of it," and turned away. He walked to the taffrail and stood looking down

at the smooth water below for two or three minutes, while the mate and I waited to see what he would do next.

“One thing is very certain,” he said at last, “we must take possession of those knives, they will be valuable evidence.”

I heard the mate gasp, and I know that for myself I felt my gorge rise at the mere thought of touching the body.

“Which of you is going to do it?” he asked. “For I tell you straight out I couldn’t lay a finger on him.”

“And I don’t know that I could,” continued Jackson with a very white face.

They must have seen from mine that I was in very much the same condition as themselves.

“It seems a gruesome sort of thing to do,” I said. “But what’s to prevent our tossing for it.”

This course was so obviously fair, that although both would willingly have had me do the work, they could not discover any legitimate reason for objecting. We retired to the star-board side of the poop, and then commenced the most grizzly gamble that it has ever been my lot to take part in. My star and the Captain’s were in the ascendant, for the result showed that the unfortunate mate was to do

the deed. We turned away while the task was being accomplished, and when next we looked round it was to find the body hidden beneath the canvas, the knives lying on the deck, and Jackson being violently ill over the port rail.

When he had recovered himself I informed them of the second discovery I had made, and suggested that we should adjourn to the cuddy. Once there, I took down the decanter of rum from the swinging tray and poured out three stiff glasses. I can assure you that we all stood in need of the stimulant, and Jackson perhaps more than all.

Before venturing near the cabin whence the moans had proceeded we visited the others in rotation. By the time we had finished the inspection, which included the pantry, the potent liquor we had drunk had begun to take effect, imbuing us with sufficient courage to make what we expected would be the last and most important discovery of all. We approached the door and I knocked as before upon it, but this time no sound followed. I knocked again and again, and each time with the same result, only complete silence.

“Are you quite sure you were not mistaken?” asked the Skipper. “Do you think that you imagined you heard somebody? Remember

you were worked up to a high pitch of excitement."

"I'd stake my life on it," I answered, with a sharpness that showed how highly strung my nerves must have been. "The first time I thought I might have been mistaken, but when I heard it again, I knew that I was not. What is to be done? Shall we break in the door?"

"There seems to be no other course open to us," returned the Skipper. "And as you are the biggest man you'd better try your hand at it."

"Very well then. Here goes. Stand by and give me plenty of room."

They did so, and stepping back as far as the bench beside the table, I took a run and caught it with my left shoulder. The door flew open with a crash, and, having plenty of way on, I was precipitated with it into the cabin and against the berth on the further side. The Captain and Jackson hurried in after me, and then we looked about us. We had seen one terrible sight on the deck above. Here was one that could rival it for piteousness. Crouching on the floor, her face turned from us, was a woman, and well off, if one might judge from her dress and the rings

upon her fingers. She did not turn her head to look at us, nor by any sign did she allow us to see that she was aware of our presence. Her long, black hair had fallen upon her shoulders, and reached almost to her waist. As the others did not move I went forward to her and placed my hand upon her shoulder. Perhaps, in my nervousness, I may have been rougher than I intended, at any rate without warning or cry she toppled over and lay unconscious at my feet. I knelt beside her and gazed at her face. I have tackled your credulity pretty heavily already, I am going to do so again. Believe it or not, *hers was the other face I had seen in my dream—that of the woman who had gazed at me with such imploring eyes.*

“She has fainted,” I said. “What had we better do?”

I might here explain that I was then unskilled in such matters.

“Carry her into the cuddy,” was the Captain’s suggestion; “and give her some of that grog. It will bring her to if anything will. Poor girl, she has suffered, if ever one has.”

He was certainly right, as I was destined to find out afterwards. Surely no other woman has ever been through more than she had.

Following the Captain's advice, we carried her into the cuddy, and seated her on the bench. Jackson procured some of the rum with which, for want of anything better, we bathed her temples. It was impossible to get her to drink any of it, as her teeth were firmly clenched and we could not open them.

"If only we carried a doctor," said the Skipper, when we had been trying, without success, for some ten minutes to bring her to. "It is impossible to say how we ought to act. For all we know to the contrary we may be doing quite wrong."

He had scarcely spoken before she opened her eyes and looked wildly about her. Her expression was more like that of a hunted deer than anything else to which I can liken it. Try to imagine the most piteous look you have ever seen on the human countenance and you will even then fall short of the mark. I had never seen anything like it before, and I don't want to again. Then slowly rising, she staggered rather than walked to the table, and leaning against it, gazed fixedly at us as if she were trying to account for our presence there.

"Madam," said the Skipper, "we are your

friends and desire to help you. Will you tell us the name of this vessel?"

She looked at him as if she did not understand the question, and then swept her hand across her eyes in an endeavour to think.

"I do not know," she at length answered in a low voice.

At any rate she was English. So much was certain.

"May I be permitted to ask your name then?" enquired the other, in his best manner.

Again she tried to remember, but was compelled at last to again admit that she did not know. Some weak spirit and water was handed to her and she drank it instinctively, shuddering as she finished it.

Seeing that it was hopeless attempting to question her, the Skipper forbore, and at a signal from him, I led her to her cabin once more. She walked as if in her sleep—as one unconscious of her actions. There was a small settee in the further corner, and on this I placed her. She immediately lay back and closed her eyes as if to sleep, and feeling that nothing could be better for her, I left her and went out, shutting the broken door after me as best I could.

Leaving the cuddy we followed the Skipper out on to the main deck. For the time being none of us cared very much about the poop.

When we reached the hatch we seated ourselves upon it. "Now, look here, Mr. Bramwell," said the Skipper, "we must decide what is to be done about this girl, and also about the vessel. She is a trim little craft and too good to be set adrift. Besides, there is this murder business to be considered, and it ought to be brought home to somebody. I'll take the lady willingly, but I can't manage the ship, nor can I spare more than one officer and a few men to work her."

What should have induced me to do it, unless it was the recollection of the girl's pleading face as I had seen it in my dream, I shall never know, but almost before I knew what I was saying, it was out.

"Give me Jackson here to go with me and two or three of your men," I said. "I can pick out another half dozen from the steerage who are old shell-backs, and I'll engage to sail her wherever you like. What do you say?"

"What I say is, done with you," he replied promptly.

We shook hands with each other on the

bargain, and unconsciously I had advanced another step towards my reunion with Giles Farrington.

Why this should have been so, I defy you to guess ! Try it, and read on and see if you are right !

CHAPTER V

WHEN I gave my rash assurance to the Captain to the effect that I was willing to take upon myself the navigation of the mysterious vessel we had picked up so strangely, I must confess that I scarcely realised what I was letting myself in for. Since then I have often endeavoured to account for it, but without success. To make my meaning clearer to you, it is only fair that I should say that I never for a moment imagined anything save that she, the unfortunate lady whom we had rescued, would be transported to the *Hullket*, and that I should carry the vessel home upon which she had hitherto travelled, with a scratch crew. I give you this assurance for the simple reason that I am anxious to disabuse your mind of any thought that I was influenced in my decision by the beautiful woman above mentioned. I take it as only fair to myself that I should make this state-

ment, and I give you my word that I do so freely and unreservedly.

“We must go into the matter thoroughly, and have witnesses,” said the Skipper, with a wave of his hand, “for nobody knows what consequences may depend upon it. There’s the body under that bit of sail cloth on the poop, for instance. What are we to do with that? We can both log the account of our finding him, but how’s that going to lead to an identification of him. We can put him overboard, but once he’s gone, he’s gone for ever and a day.”

“May I make a suggestion, sir?” asked Jackson, who had hitherto sat silent. “Miss Ferguson (the frivolous widow’s daughter) has a Kodak, which I happen to know is half full of plates. If the matter was put to her, I have not the least doubt she would lend it.”

That might be done we both agreed, but nobody ventured to suggest who should do the work.

“In the meantime,” said the Skipper, “if you will come back to the ship with me, Mr. Bramwell, we will arrange the other matters. So far as I can see you will want half a hundred things. By the way, I wonder how she is off for stores? We must know that.

I'll go back myself at once and send the steward over, who shall make an inventory, and I'll borrow Miss Ferguson's camera at the same time. While I'm away, arrange if you can with that poor young thing below to come off to us as soon as possible. The sooner she is away from this craft the better, not only for her sake, but for everyone else's. I can leave that safely in your hands, I know."

I promised to do my best, and then Jackson saw him over the side and away back to his own ship.

"I hope you have no objection to serving with me, Jackson?" I said to the young fellow when he joined me once more. "I think between us we ought to hit it off very well together."

"I am sure we shall," was his reply. "What I want, however, is to get that over the side before the men come aboard. You know how superstitious they are, and how they'll turn and twist a thing about until they've made trouble for everyone."

"All in good time—all in good time. Let's hope for once in a way there won't be a breeze for a few hours, for we have any amount to do. Now, if you will just turn to and see how

things are forrard, and whether the running gear is as it should be, I'll go below and talk to the lady."

He jumped up immediately, and went off on his tour of inspection, while I made my way to the cuddy and the lady's cabin. When I knocked she came to the door almost immediately. This, I at first thought, was a good sign, but I was soon undeceived. The expression on her face was just as it had been before; though she looked at me she did not appear to recognise me. Her beautiful face was deadly pale, while her eyes seemed devoid of even the light of life.

"Will you come into the cuddy?" I asked.

She unhesitatingly did as I requested, and reaching the cushioned locker at the further end, seated herself upon it. Her small, beautifully shaped hands were tightly clasped in her lap, while her eyes never wandered from the bulkhead at the further end of the saloon.

"I hope you are feeling better than when I saw you last," I began, feeling that I must open the ball somehow.

"I am quite well," she answered in a dull, monotonous voice, like that of a person talking in her sleep.

"I do not wish to worry you unnecessarily," I continued, "but is it impossible for you now to tell me your name?"

For a few minutes she did not answer, then as before she swept her hand across her eyes.

"I cannot remember," she replied.

This was discouraging, but I determined to put another question.

"Can you tell me where you joined the vessel?"

Again the discouraging answer was, "I cannot remember."

"Can you recall nothing that happened on the voyage?"

"Nothing!"

An idea struck me, and, asking her to forgive my impertinence, I begged to be permitted to see her pocket handkerchief. She handed it to me with the same docile obedience that had brought her from the cabin. With undisguised eagerness I examined the square of cambric for some mark which might help to identify her. But the investigation did not help me much. All I could discover was an ornamental "A" embroidered in one corner.

"Your name begins with 'A,'" I said. "Perhaps if I run over some names com-

mening with that letter, it might assist your memory."

I tried Ada, Alice, Amy, Augusta, Angela, Alexandra, Amelia, Avis, Agnes, Annette, Annie, until my vocabulary was exhausted. To each one she offered the same reply. "I cannot remember."

"Are you aware you are alone upon this ship?"

"Alone?" she said, with the first sign of surprise I had seen her show. "I did not know it."

"You cannot stay here, and the Captain of the ship *Hullket*, from Sydney to London, has authorised me to offer you a passage in his vessel. You will receive every attention and comfort, and, as there are ladies on board, they will doubtless supply you with anything of which you may stand in need."

She rose slowly to her feet.

"I cannot go," she said; "I cannot leave this vessel."

"But it is impossible for you to stay here. I am going to take charge of her and navigate her to an English port."

"I will not leave her," she said, almost fiercely.

This was an unexpected development of the

situation and I did not know how to act. It was impossible to force her to leave the vessel against her will, and yet I had no desire that she should remain on board. I argued with her for several minutes, endeavouring by every means in my power to induce her to do as I asked, but nothing would move her. Her only answer was, "I will not go."

But for the trouble she had gone through, I should probably have lost my temper. As it was I had some difficulty in controlling it. Thinking a commonplace question might by chance start a train of thought that would lead to something definite, I enquired whether there was food on board. To which her only reply was, "Yes, there must be." But as I knew there was nothing either in the galley or the pantry, and she could not tell me where to find it, I was as badly off as before.

"Will you return to your cabin or will you remain here?" I asked, seeing that it was useless prolonging the discussion.

"I will remain here, if you please," she said, and re-seated herself on the locker.

I then left her and went out on to the main deck. I heard the sound of oars alongside, and knew that it must be the boat returning from the *Hullket*. The Skipper had brought with him the chief steward, whom he immedi-

ately dispatched with Jackson to the lazaret to take an inventory of the stores.

When they had departed, the Skipper turned to me.

"Well, is the young lady ready to come aboard?" he asked. "I don't want to delay any more than I can help. For I have got a notion that it won't be long before we shall have a breeze, and I shall want to make the most of it."

I explained the position she had taken up, and told him how hard I had tried to persuade her to go.

"Bother the girl," he said irritably. "I am very sorry for her, of course, but she ought to realise when she is well off. Still, if she won't go, she will have to remain on board under your care, and I wish you joy of the affair. And now for that other ghastly bit of business. I have brought the camera, which I have sealed, and I have also the sail-maker and his mate in the boat alongside. Let us take the photos, after which they can get to work."

Over the grizzly work of the next ten minutes I will draw a curtain. It is only necessary to state that we took six pictures. This done, the sail-maker and his mate, who could be trusted to hold their tongues, came

aboard and set about the work of preparing the body for its burial in the deep. It was highly essential that the men we had chosen for this task should be trustworthy, for Jack is proverbially superstitious, and had they returned to the *Hullket* with a description of what had happened on board, we should have experienced considerable difficulty in obtaining men to serve aboard her.

When all was ready they carried their burden down to the main deck, to the gangway furthest from the side on which the *Hullket's* boat was lying. We bared our heads, and the two men followed our example.

"God have mercy on his soul," said the Captain solemnly.

"Amen," said I, and taking this as a signal, the sail-maker and his mate slid the body forward, and it went overboard to sink with a sullen plunge into the still water alongside.

"Thank goodness," I muttered to the Captain as we moved away. "I feel as if I can breathe more freely now."

"I never want another business like it," he replied.

We had only just finished the work in time, for, as we approached the cuddy, Jackson and

the steward made their appearance from it. They were both begrimed with dust, while the perspiration ran down their faces in streams. From the list the steward had made it appeared that there was an abundant supply of necessities for such a ship's company as we should be. There was, however, no salt junk in the harness cask, and of course nothing in the way of fresh meat or poultry—of water there was no stint.

“We can let you have some fowls, and of course as much junk as you like,” said the Skipper. “I fear, however, you will have to do without the fresh meat. And now, Mr. Bramwell, if you will accompany me back to the ship, we will set things in motion. I can smell the breeze coming.”

Before leaving, I instructed Jackson to keep his eye on the lady in the cuddy, and had myself taken the precaution of locking the pantry door and putting the key in my pocket. When you come to remember the condition of her mind, the reason for this will be obvious. Then we descended to the boat alongside, and set off for the ship. On arrival there, our first duty was to make the necessary entry in the Log, which was signed by the Skipper and myself. The fatal knives were

wrapt up and placed in the safe with the camera.

“So much for that,” said the Skipper, “and now for your crew.”

Acting under the Skipper's instructions, the chief mate had already selected five men from the ship's company, and had discovered five more in the steerage who had no objection to making a little money on the way home. To this number I added Hickson, the man with whom I had so often conversed, and who had told me repeatedly that nothing would induce him to take up a sailor's life again. Then came the question of the cook and steward. There was the lady on board to be considered. I pointed out my difficulty to the Skipper, who found an immediate solution for it.

Turning to the chief mate he said, “Make enquiries among the steerage passengers and find out whether there's a married couple aboard, the man to cook and the woman to act as stewardess. They can berth aft I suppose, Mr. Bramwell?”

I answered in the affirmative, stating that there was ample room. The chief mate went on his errand, and while he was absent I made my way to my cabin and got my traps together. Little had I dreamt when I boarded the

Hullket in Sydney that I was not destined to complete my voyage in her.

Had I been willing to spare the time I could probably have spent an hour answering the questions which the passengers were so anxious to put to me, but after all that had happened that day I was in by no means a humour to gratify their curiosity. Besides, the Captain was growing impatient, and wanted to get my men aboard and have things put ship-shape as quickly as possibly.

I had scarcely finished my packing and seen the under steward carry my belongings out to the main deck, where Jackson's had already been placed, when the chief mate came to inform me that he had discovered just the couple I wanted. The man had been cook on a station in New South Wales, while his wife had officiated as housekeeper. Provided terms could be arranged, they were both willing to join the vessel in the capacities required. The matter of remuneration was quickly settled, whereupon they went off to get together their belongings. They were not long in doing this, and in something under half an hour we were ready to bid farewell to the ship which had brought us so many thousand miles.

Prior to leaving, it was arranged that I

should take the brig to Plymouth, and wire to the owners of the *Hullket* from there. Matters could then be discussed, and the proper authorities communicated with.

I bade the passengers and officers "Good-bye," and then marshalled my company into the boats alongside. Amid hearty cheers we pushed off and headed for the craft which I was about to command. How different she appeared with a number of people moving about her decks, I must leave you to imagine. The scene was indeed an animated one, and did me good after all the horrors of the day. Having given all hands a glass of grog with which to drink success to the homeward voyage, I despatched the *Hullket's* boats, with the exception of the one lent me by the Captain (it must be remembered we were without boats at all); then, with Jackson's assistance, I began to knock things into shape. There was plenty of work for all hands, from myself down to Mrs. Flanagan, the stewardess, a motherly old party who possessed a tongue that, as Jackson declared, "Would talk the hind leg off a donkey."

One of my first acts on coming aboard was to look into the cuddy in order to discover whether my unhappy charge was safe. I found her sitting just as I had left her, still

looking straight before her, as if she were staring into vacancy. I had already explained to Mrs. Flanagan the nature of her case, though I had been careful to say nothing of the murder which had been committed on board. The old woman promised to do what she could for her, and I felt, so far as she was concerned, all would be well. It was a happy thought of the Captain's that brought her aboard.

Having seen that all was right below I returned to the deck to find a cheerful coil of smoke arising from the galley. The decks had been cleared of all we had brought from the ship, save the cuddy luggage, and this they were in the act of carrying in. For my own use I had chosen the berth in which I had found the nautical instruments, giving Jackson its companion on the opposite side. The cook and the stewardess were allotted that nearest the pantry, while its equivalent was given to Hickson, whom I had appointed bosun, to be shared with another respectable young fellow, a steerage passenger, who, should occasion arise, would act as carpenter. They were to berth aft and to take their meals forrard.

So far the Captain's prophecy of a breeze did not seem likely to be realized. The sea was

still like glass, and the heat almost overpowering. It was past mid-day by this time, and I sent word forrard to the cook to let the men have their dinner as soon as possible. As for ourselves aft, some cold tinned meat and a bottle of beer apiece met the case exactly. Mrs. Flanagan had already taken charge of the girl, whom I had decided to name Alexandra, partly on account of her queenly beauty, and partly by reason of the initial I had found upon her pocket-handkerchief. She had made up a bed for her, and with true womanly instinct, had made and taken a cup of tea, and some bread and butter which we had brought with us from the ship.

“Poor soul,” she said to me when I questioned her, “she don’t seem to have any will of her own. Does just as she is told, like a little child. I says to her, ‘Come, drink up your tea, Missy,’ and she drinks a drop or two and then seems to forget what she’s a-doing of.”

“She had been through some terrible experiences in the last few days,” I replied. “How any man could have the inhumanity to abandon the ship, leaving her locked up in that cabin to starve, is more than I can imagine. But they shall be brought to justice for it.”

“And so they should—the murderin’ devils! I’d like to have the handlin’ of them.” With that she plumped a bottle of pickles on the table with a bang as if to show the intensity of her feeling in the matter.

Our meal finished we went on deck, when the crew were called aft and divided into watches. I had set the chronometer by those of the *Hullket*, and it came as a welcome sound to hear the ship’s bell strike two.

Being anxious to make sure that we did not stand in need of anything of importance I went round to inspect the ship for myself. Much to my satisfaction this proved to be so. The boat, which would be our sole means of leaving the ship, should any ill befall her, was hoisted aboard and made secure. Then, feeling thoroughly tired out, for it must be remembered I had been awake since one o’clock that morning and had done a considerable amount of work, I went down to my cabin and finding that Mrs. Flanagan had made up my bunk, turned in, all standing, for half-an-hour’s snooze.

I was awakened by loud rapping at my door, and springing out to open it, I found Jackson awaiting me.

“We have got the breeze at last, sir,” he said. “It’s coming up hand over fist.”

“That’s good news,” I answered. “Make sail, and I’ll be with you in a minute.”

Ten minutes later we were bowling along, and I had started on the strangest voyage I had ever undertaken.

CHAPTER VI

It is not my intention to bore you with a long description of that strange voyage, for there is so much else to be told of greater interest, that it is necessary for me to be economical both of your patience and my space. In order, however, that you may understand events as they progressed, and see them in their proper light, it is imperative that I should give you a brief outline of how we fared.

To begin with, the brig, not only proved herself fast, but also an excellent sea boat. From the moment that I actually took over command of her it seemed as if my luck had changed. The breeze of which Jackson had warned me proved to be no passing zephyr, but was sufficient to carry us merrily over the Equator, thus enabling us to cross the parallel of 10° N. in 25° W. without any difficulty. After that we picked up the North East trade, and keeping her well full crossed to the North Westward as easily as the most exacting Skipper could desire.

Long ere this we had lost sight of the *Hullket*, to whom the brig could show a clean pair of heels. Wherever she had been built, and my own belief was that she hailed from New Zealand, she did credit to her designer. Why men, who must surely have known her worth, had been such fools as to abandon her, I could not for the life of me understand, though I hoped to do so later.

Good fortune favoured us inasmuch as we were extremely lucky in our ship's company. Jackson proved himself what I had hitherto known him to be, a hard working and zealous officer, Hickson made a competent bosun, while the crew themselves were not only up to their work, but prepared at all times to do it. As for Mrs. Flanagan, words fail me when I attempt to describe her. She managed the after part of the vessel as if it were a first-class boarding house, and gave unremitting care by both day and night to the unfortunate girl whom we had determined to call Miss Alexandra. Possibly her husband might have been a better cook, so far as savoury dishes were concerned, but as Jackson and I were accustomed to make the best of things, and were always as hungry as hunters, we did not find much fault with him on that score.

As for Miss Alexandra herself, I can only say that there appeared to be little or no change in her condition and, by the way, that self-same condition puzzled me more than I can tell you. Her bodily health appeared to be as good as it could possibly be. She both ate and slept well, and in a measure seemed to take an interest in what went on about her. The thing that puzzled me most, however, was her total forgetfulness of all that had transpired previous to our discovering her on board the ship. She would still sit for hours at a time, gazing straight before her as if she were watching things that we could not see. It is a strange thing when you come to think of it, and goes to show what curious anomalies we human beings are, that while I should have pitied her under any circumstances, I fear she had my compassion in a much larger degree on account of her beauty. I am willing to confess that women have not had much to do with my life. As a matter of fact, I had never served on board a ship that carried lady passengers, or travelled in one until I joined the *Hullket*. As for the lady passengers aboard her there was not one, and I say it advisedly, so far as beauty was concerned, who was fit to hold half a candle to her. I am prepared to admit that the vagueness of her previous history

irritated me more than I can say. Since she did not know it herself, it was impossible for us to tell who or what she was. The absence of a wedding ring from her finger would seem to indicate that she was unmarried. One thing struck me as significant, and that was the neatness of her dress. Whether it was because whatever she wore must inevitably suit her, or because she had a natural taste in dress, I cannot say, but the fact remains that, with the simplest materials, she invariably produced a most artistic effect. And here I must relate a little incident which, whenever I think of it now, always strikes me as peculiar.

It was on the third night after our taking over the brig, and I can recall every circumstance connected with it quite clearly. We dined at seven o'clock, that is to say if such a meal could be called dinner. Three of us sat down to it, Miss Alexandra, Jackson and myself. I had already made it a rule that Hickson should stand the watch in order to allow the mate to partake of his meal.

On this particular evening it struck me that Miss Alexandra seemed a little brighter than usual, and after the coffee had been served (we were as luxurious as that), and Jackson

had returned to the deck to finish the remainder of his watch, I looked at the girl seated on my right hand. A prettier picture than she presented at that moment it would have been impossible to imagine.

"Miss Alexandra," I said, "for by this time she had become accustomed to the name, "you have been below too long. Will you not allow me to take you on deck this evening? The fresh air will do you good."

"I will go if you wish," she answered, obedient as usual to any wish I might express.

"Then please see that you put on something warm," I continued, "for I fancy you will find the breeze chilly."

Without another word she rose and made her way to her cabin. Had any stranger chanced upon us at that moment and had seen her crossing the cuddy, he would have found it difficult to believe that there was anything the matter with her. In a few minutes she returned, clad in a warm cloak and with a lace mantilla, the gift of the frivolous widow, wrapt about her shapely head. The brig was heeling over a bit to starboard, so I offered her my arm. She took it without hesitation, and we ascended the narrow companion together. It was a lovely night, and the little vessel was spinning along before a spanking breeze,

throwing off long lines of phosphorescent foam from either bow. It was a night on which it was good to be alive. Overhead the stars blazed out, as Jackson said, "like lamps upon the Thames Embankment." It was a poor simile, but in a certain sense it hit the mark.

As we left the companion eight bells sounded, and the watch below came tumbling up. A big man, a Dane I believe, took the wheel, and the fellow he had relieved went forward. Having made his report Jackson touched his cap to Miss Alexandra and went below. I am not a romantic man, as I have already said, but I don't mind telling you that I can feel the touch of those soft fingers on my arm even now. I led her aft, and we stood together at the taffrail. Up to that moment she had not spoken. I glanced at her as she leant with her elbows on the rail, and came to the conclusion that I had never seen so beautiful a picture. She was grace personified. As she stooped to look down on the wake, her hands were clasped as if she were praying. The bubbling water seemed to have a strange fascination for her, for when I spoke to her she did not appear to hear me. Suddenly she stood upright, and turning her back to the rail, looked forrard. What she saw, or what

she thought she saw, I shall probably never know, but never had I seen anything so queenly as her attitude at that moment. It would have been worth a fortune to her on the stage. The lace she had draped about her head had fallen back, and a coil of black hair lay upon her shoulder. Then she turned to me, and seizing me by the wrist said---

“Look ! Look ! Do you see the blood ?”

With her left hand she pointed to the exact spot where we had discovered the man pinned out, as described in the previous chapter. There was nothing there, of course, but that she believed she saw it, I shall never doubt.

Again she muttered—“Look ! Look ! The blood ! See how it stains the deck !”

I tried to reason with her, but in vain. The only answer I could get from her was—“The blood ! The blood !”

With the intention of distracting her thoughts I proposed that we should walk. With her usual childlike obedience she did so, but I noticed that every time we passed the spot where the man had lain she shrank away, and yet, I pledge you my word, there was nothing to be seen.

Thinking it might cheer her I began to talk

to her of other matters—of my life at sea, of the various places I had visited, and of the adventures I had met with. She listened, but it did not take much to see that she was not interested.

“I am afraid you do not hear what I am saying to you, Miss Alexandra,” I remarked somewhat tartly—for I was a little chagrined, I must confess, that she should still remain so silent.

“Yes,” she answered, “I heard you—but I’m afraid I did not understand.”

Here she put her hand up to her forehead, as if she were in pain, and at once I began to upbraid myself for my cruelty towards her. To change the subject I adopted the commonplace, and enquired whether she was fond of the sea.

“The sea?” she repeated, still in the same monotonous voice. “Yes, I am fond of the sea.”

“Have you ever done a voyage before?” I asked, hoping that by putting the question in a casual way, as if it were a matter of no concern, I might obtain some inkling of her extraordinary story—for extraordinary it must certainly have been.

Again her hand swept her brow, as if to brush away the cobwebs in her brain.

"I think so—but I cannot say," was her answer. "It all seems so foggy to me. Oh! if only I could wake up. I have had such terrible dreams!"

Here was my chance, and I hastened to avail myself of it. Since I had known her she had not said so much to me.

"Tell me about those dreams," I said, but without any show of eagerness, for I was fearful of destroying whatever small train of thought there might be in her poor overwrought brain.

She paused for upwards of a minute before she replied, and stood looking over the rail across the starlit sea.

"They frighten me," she said at last, "yet I cannot escape them. They dragged him out before my eyes and carried him on deck. I can hear his screams now. Oh God! I can hear them now!"

She covered her face with her hands, and her whole frame shook with the violence of her emotion. The person to whom she referred, as I took it, was the man whom we had found pinned upon the deck. At the risk of hurting her, I could not refrain from putting another question.

"But who carried him on deck?" I asked, hoping once more to entrap her.

“They did,” she answered, and then repeated—“they dragged him out and carried him on deck, and I ran to my cabin and crouched in the corner. He fought—oh! merciful God—how he fought. But it was no use—no use at all. Then I was alone!”

“But who were the men who committed this dastardly act?” I asked, feeling that at this rate I should never get to the bottom of the mystery. “Cannot you tell me that?”

She did not appear to hear me, and when I looked more closely at her I discovered that her eyes were closed as if she were asleep. I realised then that it would be useless to attempt to extract any more information from her. Taking her arm I suggested that perhaps it would be as well if she went below, for the dew was falling heavily. Obedient as usual, she turned at once and allowed me to conduct her to the companion ladder, and thence to the cuddy below. At her cabin door I bade her “good-night.” She, in her turn, wished me “good-night”—though I very much fear it was mechanical, and that she was not conscious of what she was saying. After that I returned to the deck and lit my pipe. As you may suppose, I had plenty to think about as I patrolled the poop.

What was the mystery that enshrouded this

ship? What was the reason of the crime that had undoubtedly been committed on board her? If it had been mutiny, why had they been at such pains to leave the ship so spick and span—for as a rule mutineers, having disposed of their officers, do not turn to and clean up before taking their departure. On the contrary, they bolt like rats, unless their object is to seize the vessel, which was plainly not so in this case. Then again, who was the man whom we had discovered so brutally murdered and pinned to the deck? He did not look like a sea-faring man, though for that matter I have known many skippers who might well have passed for clergymen, doctors, or lawyers. If, however, he *had* been the Skipper, what had become of the mates? Possibly, I argued, they might have been murdered too, and their bodies thrown overboard—or, on the other hand, they might have cast in their lot with the mutineers, and have left the ship with them. This strain of thought brought me to the most puzzling of all. If they, the mutineers, had obtained possession of the vessel—as they undoubtedly had done, why did they leave her in mid-ocean? They could not hope to make the land, and no other vessel would take them off a ship like this without enquiry. It was

not as if she were unsound in any way—on the contrary, she was as trim a craft as the heart of a mariner could desire. The whole thing was entirely inexplicable, and I could not make head or tail of it—try how I would. I devoted three pipes to the consideration of it, and then came to the conclusion that it was beyond me, and that it would be better to leave it alone and to trust to time to solve the mystery for me. This did not prevent me, however, from speaking to Jackson on the subject when he came on deck at eight bells (midnight) to relieve me.

“What do you think of it all?” I asked him. “For my part I can’t make head or tail of it. It seems out of all proportion. First you think you’ve arrived at a solution of the problem only to discover that another circumstance has cropped up to throw down your theory like a house of cards.”

“I don’t mind confessing that it beats me,” he answered frankly. “I’ve nearly addled my brains trying to come to an understanding as to what it all means. But what makes you speak of it to-night, sir?”

I described the conversation I had had with Miss Alexandra earlier in the evening, and her curious statements about the man being carried on deck, his screams, and her subsequent rush

to her cabin, and the agony she suffered there. It is quite possible that in my excitement I may have made the colour a little lurid, but under the circumstances that did not matter very much.

"Now, what do you think about it?" I asked in conclusion.

"As I said before, I don't know what to think," he replied. "It's too big a riddle for me to answer. One thing, however, is quite certain, and that is the fact that the man we found dead on this poop had nothing to do with the working of this ship."

I gave a start of surprise. If he were right, here was one thing explained.

"Good Heavens," I said. "How on earth do you know that?"

"In the first place, because he had not the appearance of a sailor," he replied, as if that in itself were a conclusive argument.

I answered him as I have already written, and I think convinced him that that view of the question counted for nothing. He was by no means disconcerted.

"Oh, but I've more up my sleeve," he went on, and began fumbling in his pockets for something. Eventually he produced a torn piece of paper which he handed to me with an

air of pride. "Look at that," he said, "and see if it tells you anything."

I carried it to the binnacle and examined it by the light of the lamps there. The man at the wheel watched me with some curiosity. Probably it did look rather odd to one who was not in the secret.

Without doubt it was a luggage label and torn half across from right to left. The sort of label that one sticks on the top of trunks when travelling. The reverse side had been gummed but this had mostly disappeared. The name written upon the paper had disappeared, and all that remained was the single word "Esq.," and below "ger to London"—below that again "on voyage." All this was as plain as noonday. The man, whoever he might have been, was a passenger to England, and the particular item of luggage to which this label had been attached, was wanted on the voyage. But what reason had Jackson for supposing that this label had anything to do with the unfortunate individual whom we had found upon the deck?

I left the binnacle and went across to where he was standing at the back of the poop.

"Where did you get this?" I asked when I reached him.

“In the cabin next to mine,” he answered. “This afternoon I thought I would have a browse around and see if I could discover anything. I found this crumpled up under the bunk—torn off evidently, and thrown down there thinking it would never be noticed.”

“But how do you propose to connect it with the murdered man?”

“I don’t know that I can connect it at all—but it looks very much as if it might have belonged to him.”

The matter was growing more and more complicated every minute. For my part my head was whirling under the strain. I felt just as one does in a dream, when, do what one will, one cannot understand anything, or make anyone else understand.

“But, good gracious, man,” I cried at last, “if it came off his luggage—where is his luggage now? Answer me that? They, I mean the mutineers, would not be likely to burden themselves with his trunks, and if they didn’t, where are they now? Solve that acrostic, and, I believe, we’ll come near getting to business.”

Jackson had a tendency at times to drop into slang. He did so on this occasion.

“It’s a fair corker,” he observed emphatically. “I never knew another like it.”

“Well,” I said, “I think I’ve worried enough over it to-night. I shall go below and see if I can dream of it. So far as I can tell it’s about all we can do.”

Having given him the course, I accordingly went down to the cuddy, had a glass of grog, and then made my way to my cabin. Ten minutes later I was in bed and fast asleep, destined not to wake till the steward came to call me at seven o’clock.

Next day, and greatly to my disappointment, I found that Miss Alexandra had relapsed into her former semi-comatose condition. She seemed unconscious of anything that went on around her, and when I persuaded her to accompany me on deck, and found a comfortable place for her alongside the companion, she sat there, looking straight before her with lack-lustre eyes, as if she had no sort of idea where she was. It was a pitiable thing to witness. Poor girl! I felt indeed sorry for her, but alas I could do nothing to help her.

At this juncture I found myself confronted with a serious problem. When we reached England, what was I going to do with her? The owners of the *Hullket* would not of course be willing to provide for her, we could not discover the name of the ship (I had tried to

do so by every means in my power—but in vain. It had been erased most carefully wherever it had been painted), in which case we could not communicate with the underwriters. There were no papers to be found aboard her, and no clue as to the name of the Skipper or any of his officers. Even the identity of the girl herself was entirely unknown to us. What then was her fate to be? What was more, I had tacitly constituted myself her protector. As she had no money, and no means of supporting herself, it would be out of the question to allow her to go to the workhouse, which, unless something were done, must be her inevitable fate. This worried me more than I can say. I thought about it day and night. She was so beautiful—evidently so well-bred—that the thought of such a fate befalling her was more painful to me than I can say. Yet I had no desire, at least not at that time, to have her upon my hands. I had come home for a holiday, and did not intend turning myself into a charity asylum for distressed damsels, however beautiful. I might just as well have expected Jackson to give up the sea and stay at home to look after her. She had as much claim upon him as she had upon me.

“A pretty hole you’ve got yourself into,

my lad," I said to myself. "How you're going to get out of it, I don't quite see." Nor did I.

However, sooner or later, everything rights itself, and by the time we were in the Channel, Providence had found me some sort of a way out of my difficulty.

It was a perfect morning. Overhead the sky was a beautiful sapphire blue. The water had just that crisp liveliness that betokens a fair sailing breeze. Cannot you see the picture? The canvas bellying out like so many great balloons, the breeze humming through the shrouds like the weird Æolian Harp, and the foam streaking out (I can think of no better word) on either bow like swansdown upon the water.

It was Jackson who solved the problem for me. I told him of my dilemma. He heard me out, and then pondered for a few moments. Jackson pondering was a sight worth seeing. At last he appeared to have come to some sort of an understanding with himself.

"Just look here," he began in the abrupt way that was peculiar to him. "I've been thinking it over. I've seen you've been worried these last few days, and I guessed what it was about. You want to know what

you're to do with Miss Alexandra when we get home ! ”

“ You've hit the nail on the head this time,” I answered.

“ Very good then,” he continued. “ Now listen to my idea. I'll tell you what is the best thing to be done.”

CHAPTER VII

It may be readily imagined with what impatience I waited to be told Jackson's scheme. What it was I could not even conjecture. When all was said and done he was the last man from whom I expected to receive any sort of help.

"Well, what can you do for me?" I asked somewhat impatiently, I'm afraid. "If you can see a way out of the difficulty, I can assure you you're a cleverer man than I am. Let me hear what you have to say."

He scratched his head and paused for a minute before he replied. He was evidently turning something over in his mind. Having summed him up by this time I did not interrupt him.

"Well, you see, it's this way," he began rather bashfully. "My mother's a widow."

I did not quite see what this had to do with the case—but I let him go on his own

way and tell the story according to his own fashion.

"As I say, Mother's a widow," he went on. "She lives at Hampton Court—close to the Palace, and she's got nobody but my sister and a cross-grained old brute of a servant with her. She'd welcome a girl like Miss Alexandra with open arms, and I'd stake my life she'd look after her like a mother. Of course she couldn't afford to keep her for nothing—but I guess we could make the firm contribute something towards it. Why shouldn't she go down to the mater—if only for a time, and until you know what you are going to do with her?"

This certainly seemed to be a way out of my difficulty, and I jumped at it as you may suppose. Nothing could have suited my purpose better.

"But are you quite sure that your mother would care to take her in?" I enquired.

"I'm perfectly sure of it," was his answer, and he added quickly, as if on an after-thought. "Of course you could go down and see her whenever you wanted to."

To this generous suggestion I do not pretend that I offered any reply.

At last we reached Plymouth and brought up inside the breakwater. When the cable

ran through the hawse hole, one of the most eventful voyages of my life was at an end. We made the harbour between seven and half-past in the morning—the water like glass, and scarcely enough wind to bring us to our anchorage. Before me was the historic Hoe, to the left Mount Edgcumbe, and to the right the fort-clad heights of Stadden.

When all is said and done there are few places more beautiful than the Metropolis of the West, as it is called by admirers. And a long sea voyage, with all its attendant troubles, is just the thing to make one appreciate its beauties.

As soon as I arrived I despatched a telegram to the *Hullket's* owners, advising them of my arrival and asking for instructions. I can well imagine what a surprise that message must have been to them—for of course they knew nothing of me—not even my name—and as I could not give them the name of the ship. Doubtless they deemed me a madman of the first degree. However, in due course, a reply reached me to the effect that a member of the firm was starting for Plymouth and would be with me that night.

During the afternoon I persuaded Miss

Alexandra to come on deck. How pretty she looked I cannot tell you. The rest and quiet of the last week had worked wonders with her. The colour had come back to her cheeks and the light into her eyes. How much this pleased me I leave you to guess—but why did not her memory return, too? You can have no idea how miserable this made me. Never could there have been a sweeter woman. That she was grateful for such little services as I could do for her was apparent—and yet, try how I might, I could not lift the veil that hid the secret of the last few weeks.

We paced the poop together, and then I broached the subject of her future.

“Can you realise that this is Old England?” I said to her, by way of introduction, for between ourselves, I don’t mind admitting that I was more than a little bit nervous. It isn’t every day that a man is called upon to arrange the future of a beautiful girl, of whose antecedents he knows absolutely nothing, yet with whom he is over head and ears in love. For I don’t mind confessing that by this time I was madly in love with her.

The afternoon train brought the director

I have already spoken of. I was below at the time of his arrival—but Jackson received him at the gangway. As soon as I heard my name called I bundled out of my bunk—I had turned in, of course, all standing, and ran up on deck.

“Mr. Bramwell, I believe,” said a tall, well dressed gentleman. “My name is Braithwaite. I am one of the directors of the *Hullket* line. We had a telegram from you this morning. Of course, we’re quite in the dark about the whole matter, but doubtless you can explain.”

“I am afraid it is a matter that will require a good deal of explaining,” I replied. “In the first place, it seems to me that I should tell you who I am.”

A short pause ensued. While it lasted I took stock of his immaculate top hat and frock coat, patent leather boots, and diamond scarf pin. Then I proceeded to let him know the circumstances of the case. I will do him the justice of saying that he listened attentively to what I had to say, but before I was half way through the narrative I had arrived at the conclusion that the firm would do nothing for me.

Of course, for salvaging the vessel they could not help themselves, but as for helping

the poor girl—they could only make excuses, using as a plea the fact that they were a Company, and as such charity was not to be expected of them.

“I suppose in that case you expect me to provide for her,” I said, feeling as if I could knock him down.

“That is a matter for your own consideration,” he replied, with a smug smile that roused me almost to a frenzy. “From what you have told me I gather that you took the whole responsibility upon your own shoulders. Of course, we should be only too glad to do anything we can, but you must see that we are placed in a very invidious position. We know nothing of the lady. You admit that a murder was committed on board, you accept command, and the first thing you do is to destroy all traces of the crime. Yet you expect us to take everything for granted, and do just as you wish.”

“But I give you my word.”

He raised his hand as if in protest.

“You must forgive me, but my word is my word, and when I have said that I’ve said everything. If you’re going to throw this poor girl over you deserve to be hung, and by the Lord Harry I’d willingly do it for you.”

I suppose in all his life he'd never been talked to like that. It certainly did not agree with him, but little I cared! I wasn't his servant, and had no desire to be.

"We'll have to fight this matter out," said he, as he went towards the gangway. "You've insulted me!"

"Have I?" I replied. "Get off my boat, or I'll take my boot to you."

Before I could say any more he was down the gangway and into the launch alongside.

"You'll hear from me about this," he shouted up to me. "I'll teach you that you can't insult people with impunity, my fine gentleman."

To this threat I offered no reply, but walked to the other side of the deck, where Jackson was standing grinning from ear to ear.

"I don't envy you your employers, if that's a sample," I remarked. "I should have liked to manhaul him a bit. It would do him good."

"You're not the only one," he replied. "It's just that sort of man who makes a sea life the hell it is. Poor pay, cheap stores, and clear out and find another berth if you're not satisfied. It's a paying game from their point of view, but not from ours."

"Now, what about Miss Alexandra?" I asked. "We must think about her."

"Why not do what I suggested and let her go to my mother," he answered. "I'll tell you what I will do. I've got a few pounds saved, and if you like to go into it I'll do what I can to help."

His offer touched me more than I can say. He was a typical sailor, full of generosity and kindness of heart, and willing to surrender anything he'd got to help another in distress. I told him that there was no need for him to do anything of the kind, but that if he would ask his mother to take the poor girl in, it would not only be doing a service to her, but would be laying me under an everlasting obligation.

That afternoon he telegraphed to his mother, and later received an answer to the effect that she would be very glad to do anything she could to help.

Accordingly, next morning, having for the time being severed my connection with the ill-fated vessel, I left her in Jackson's charge and went ashore, taking Miss Alexandra with me. From the manager of one of the principal hotels I obtained the address of a doctor who was a specialist in mind diseases. Engaging a cab I drove her there at once. I can see her

now, sitting in that half darkened room, looking as beautiful as any woman could be. I did my best to interest her, but without success. She did not seem to care for anything. It was one of the saddest things I have ever seen in my life.

Presently our turn came, and I asked for an interview with the doctor. Miss Alexandra I left in charge of a nurse.

I can see now that grave, professional face, with its kindly grey eyes looking out from beneath the shaggy brows.

"May I ask what you think is the matter with your wife?" he began, putting up his *pince-nez* as he spoke.

"The lady is not my wife," I replied, and in response to another enquiry I proceeded to give him a rough outline of the case. He listened attentively, nodding his head at intervals to show that he understood.

"Very sad, very sad," he said, when I had finished. "I have only seen one instance like it. I will see her and let you know what I think of the case."

He rang the bell and instructed the servant to usher the lady into the room. On hearing this I rose to leave, feeling that it would be better for him to see her alone. Try to imagine what an anxious time it was for me.

It was as if all my life—all my happiness—depended on the issue of the next few minutes. You cannot think how anxiously I watched the hands of the clock. Every minute seemed an hour. At last the door opened and she entered the room. It was apparent at once that the interview had had no effect upon her. She showed no signs of emotion, nor did she appear to possess any definite knowledge of her surroundings.

“May I see you for a moment?” asked the doctor, when she had entered the room and had seated herself.

I accordingly followed him into his consulting room and seated myself in the chair I had previously occupied.

“What do you think about the case?” I asked, not, I can assure you, without a considerable amount of anxiety. “Will she ever recover?”

“I cannot see why she should not,” he replied. “It is evident that she has received a great mental shock, but she is young, and with care and quiet I see no reason why she should not regain her normal faculties. Quiet is, however, the essential thing. Excitement of any kind must be avoided. If you will be guided by me, you will take her to some quiet

inland place, and to use a slang expression, allow her to run wild for a time. After a shock, such as she has undoubtedly received, you may be quite sure that mental rest is the only positive cure."

"I will follow your advice most faithfully," I replied, picking up my hat as I spoke.

"Keep her as cheerful as you can," he continued. "Avoid excitement as far as possible, induce her to take as much out-of-door exercise as you can, and I feel sure you will see a vast improvement in a few weeks. She is naturally a strong and healthy girl, and I should say she would throw it off after a time, but you will have to be diplomatic."

I assured him that I would do all I possibly could, and then, having settled matters with him, returned to the reception room, where Miss Alexandra was awaiting my coming. She rose as I entered, and came towards me with hands outstretched.

"Take me away," she said, "I am afraid of this house. Why did you bring me here?"

"Because I wanted to make you quite strong again," I said. "Surely you do not blame me for that. You have had a lot of trouble, and

I want to take it off your shoulders if I can."

"I am afraid I do not understand," she answered.

"You must not try to," was my reply. "Leave everything to me, and you will find it will be all right in the end."

Having seen the doctor I returned to the ship, taking Miss Alexandra with me. I cannot tell you how anxious I was to see the last of her—the ship, of course, I mean—not Miss Alexandra.

Two hours later we were in the train, flying across country *en route* for London. I had made my report to the authorities, and had left Jackson in charge, pending the decision of the *Hullket* Board. Through their representative they had informed me that they did not intend doing anything for Miss Alexandra, so I did not feel in any way bound to them.

It was nearly six o'clock before we reached London—a muggy, close afternoon, with a suspicion of thunder in the air. As the express did not stop at Surbiton, it was necessary for us to go on to Waterloo, and then to take the train on the other line back to Hampton Court.

During the entire journey Miss Alexandra

scarcely spoke. When I gave her lunch—for which I had telegraphed beforehand—she thanked me, but seemed to take no sort of interest in it. I tried to rouse her without success. It seemed as if the mystery that surrounded her was not to be solved. She sat in her corner of the compartment I had reserved for ourselves, looking straight before her, never glancing out of the window, and apparently oblivious of all that went on around her.

On reaching Waterloo we had time to have a cup of tea before catching the train for Hampton Court. It had been a long and tiring journey, but she had not once complained. While we were standing on the platform at Waterloo I noticed the way in which people looked at her. Yet she was quite unconscious of any admiration she excited. As a matter of fact, I really do not believe that she had any knowledge of how beautiful she was. She was the first woman I have ever loved, and, in consequence, you must forgive me if I am a little conceited, though I can assure you I have not the least intention to be.

Jackson had not only written to his mother to inform her of our coming, but I had also taken the precaution of telegraphing to her

from Plymouth, giving her the time at which we hoped to arrive.

On reaching Hampton Court I engaged a cab and bade the man drive us to Acacia Villa, by which name Mrs. Jackson's residence was known to the neighbourhood. It was situated near the lock, and commanded a pretty view of the river. I was agreeably surprised by it, for I had feared that it might be of the usual suburban type, and situated in some back street.

"This, Miss Alexandra," I said, as the cab drew up before the door, "is to be, for a time at least, your home. Do you think you will like it?"

"I cannot tell," she answered, "but I suppose so."

By the time we had alighted, the cabman had rung the bell and had carried the small trunk of necessaries which I had purchased for her in Plymouth up the steps to the front door, which was opened by a neat maid servant. Our arrival was evidently expected, for we were invited to enter, and informed that Mrs. Jackson was awaiting us in the drawing room. She proved to be a pleasant, picturesque old lady with grey hair, a little lame, but with a cheery smile and a winning manner. She welcomed her new charge with

motherly kindness, and then shook hands with me.

"I feel sure we shall be very good friends, my dear," she continued, addressing the girl. "And I hope you will be happy with us."

She enquired what sort of journey we had had and proffered us tea, but as we had partaken of it in the train we both declined. We had scarcely done so before the door opened and a tall, buxom girl, boasting an absurd likeness to my late mate, entered the room.

"This is my daughter, Janet," remarked the old lady, and she shook hands with both of us.

After a few moments' conversation the new-comer suggested that their guest might like to see her room, and they accordingly went out together, leaving me alone with the old lady, which was exactly what I wanted.

"Mrs. Jackson," I said after a short pause, "I cannot thank you enough for your kindness in taking in this poor girl who has suffered as very few girls of her age have ever done."

"Remember I know scarcely anything of the matter," she replied. "It is true my

son wrote to me and asked me if I would be willing to take her in, but, though he said she had been through terrible trouble at sea, he did not tell us what that trouble was, for the reason that he thought it would come better from you."

I then set to work and told her everything. She heard me out with undisguised interest and horror, remarking at intervals "poor girl—poor girl."

"And I understand she can remember nothing of what occurred," she said when I had finished.

"Nothing of any importance," was my reply. "The memory of that terrible time is wiped off her brain just as one wipes figures off a slate. We are even ignorant of her name, though we call her Alexandra. I thought Seymour might do for a surname until we can discover her own. It is not a very brilliant flight of fancy, but it will serve the purpose as well as another."

"But if you say that every trace of her identity, or that of the ship, was destroyed, how is that identity to be discovered, and who will do it?"

"I shall," I replied. "I have set my heart upon bringing the inhuman wretches to book,

and I shall not rest content until I have mastered every detail of one of the most atrocious crimes I, or any other man, ever heard of."

"You appear to feel very strongly on the subject, Mr. Bramwell," she said, and as she did so it struck me that she looked rather curiously at me through her gold-rimmed spectacles.

"Who could help doing so," was my reply. "My blood boils whenever I think of it."

"And I understand that the owners of the *Hullket*, who will probably make a considerable sum of money out of it, will not contribute in any way to the poor girl's support?"

"Not one halfpenny," I answered, remembering the scene I had had with the Director that morning.

"Forgive an old woman's impertinence, but am I right in supposing that you, a perfect stranger, intend doing it yourself?"

I answered her in the affirmative.

"You are very generous."

"Not at all. I pity her from the bottom of my heart. But, Mrs. Jackson, do not let us misunderstand each other. I am doing it because I love her, and because I hope some day to make her my wife. But not

while her mind is clouded like this. She shall have fair play, and if, when she can think for herself, she will take me for her husband, I shall be amply repaid for anything I have done."

CHAPTER VIII

As may be readily supposed it did not require much persuasion on Mrs. Jackson's part to induce me to remain to dinner. I sat opposite Miss Alexandra, and as I looked at her across the white napery and silver in that quiet, home-like room, the like of which is never to be found I firmly believe out of England, and thought of the day on which I had discovered her in the corner of her cabin, the whole thing seemed like a hideous nightmare too terrible to be believable. Both Mrs. Jackson and her daughter treated her with marked kindness, and more than once I thanked my good fortune in having found such a peaceful and pleasant home for her. If perfect quiet and loving care could do it, surely she should recover here, and then?

At last the time came for me to say "good-bye." I thanked the old lady once more, shook hands with Miss Janet, and then turned to say farewell to the girl who had been my constant companion half across the world. She rose from her chair and gave me her little hand that seemed to be lost in my brawny fist.

"Good-bye, Miss Alexandra," I said.

"Good-bye," she answered, and then, after a momentary pause, continued, "I thank you from the bottom of my heart for all you have done for me."

I cannot tell you how touched I was by those few simple words. Mrs. Jackson must have noticed my embarrassment, for she came to the rescue by giving me an invitation to visit them whenever I cared to do so.

After that I left the house and made my way to the railway station, where I was just in time to catch a train for London. Having collected my luggage at Waterloo I drove to the hotel I had decided upon, engaged a room, drank a whisky and soda, and smoked a cigar, after which I retired to my apartment feeling that, if I had done nothing else, I had at least earned a good night's rest.

After breakfast next morning I visited my bank, arranged matters with the manager, obtained a cheque book, and returned to my hotel to write to Mrs. Jackson, enclosing a draft sufficient to pay the first quarter's expenses, and to enable Miss Alexandra to obtain such clothes as she might require. Poor girl, she stood badly enough in need of a new rig out.

After that I went off to have a look round the town that I had not seen for so many years. What a city it is! What wealth, and also what poverty! What palatial buildings, cheek by jowl with slums so horrible that one wonders they are permitted to exist, and what loneliness is there like that of being a stranger without a friend or even acquaintance in that Great Metropolis? So far as I was aware I knew no one, except my banker who would not recognise me if he saw me again.

That evening I went to a theatre, though what the piece was I couldn't tell you. I am afraid I was more interested in the people about me than in what was going on on the stage. The house was packed from floor to ceiling, and as I looked at the beautiful women in the stalls and boxes with their fine

dresses and flashing jewels, my mind went back to the wild life I had so long been leading, and to the memory of that dingy little cabin of the brig. Yet I am prepared to assert that had Miss Alexandra been present in the house that night, dressed as were those about her, there would not have been one who could have equalled her either in beauty or in grace. Lover's partiality you will say, yet I know it to be true.

Between the first and second acts I went out to smoke a cigarette and to get a little fresh air, for the theatre was very hot and burdened with every conceivable sort of scent. The bar was crowded with men of all ranks and appearances, and as I smoked I amused myself watching them. Presently I became aware of a tall, well-dressed individual, who was gazing at me through an eye-glass. He was a handsome man, with a heavy moustache, and seemed to take an evident interest in myself. At the end of the next act I again came out to find him still there. Once more I saw him steadfastly regarding me.

When the play concluded I left the theatre and walked down the street in the direction of my hotel. I had not gone very

far before a brisk step behind me attracted my attention. I did not turn, however, until a man's voice said: "Will you excuse me, sir, if I ask to be allowed to speak to you for one moment?" It was my friend of the theatre.

"Perhaps, as the night is cold, we might walk together for a short distance."

I had no objection to raise, and as I was curious to know what he wanted of me, I assented, and we passed along the street together.

"Is not your name Bramwell?" he asked.

I replied that it was, though I could not for the life of me understand how he had become aware of the fact.

"You were in Australia for some time, I believe?"

"I have only just left the Antipodes," was my reply. "May I ask how you know my name and where I come from?"

"That is very easily explained," he said with a laugh. "My name is Armitage, and I live in Sydney. You know that city well."

I was once more able to agree with him, though I did not quite see what bearing it had on the matter.

"I have extensive squatting interests," he went on. "And I am also interested in one or two lines of steamers. Is not the matter becoming clearer to you now?"

"A little," I replied; "though I cannot remember where I met you. Nor do I understand what I can do for you."

"Well, the fact of the matter is, I have only been in England a few days, and I haven't a single friend or acquaintance in the Metropolis. Recognising you, I took the liberty of thrusting myself upon you on the chance that I might be able to induce you to take pity on my loneliness. You have only to say that you don't care about it and I will trouble you no more. But if you will give me the pleasure of your company you will not only confer upon me an honour, but will make me your debtor for more than I can say. It would require very little persuasion to send me back to Sydney by the next boat. I am staying at the Imperial Hotel in the Strand. Will you do me the honour of supping with me this evening? We shall be in excellent time, and I think I can promise you one of the best meals in this Old Country."

This was hastening matters with a vengeance, but as there seemed to be the promise of an adventure in it, and I didn't know what to do with myself, I resolved to accept, and said as much to him.

"My dear fellow," he said, "you delight me. I cannot thank you enough. Shall we walk, or would you prefer a cab?"

"Let us walk by all means," I answered, and we accordingly set off together.

It struck me that for a new arrival my new acquaintance was remarkably well up in the geography of London. He led me by some extremely dark, short cuts, and eventually brought me out almost opposite his hotel. The great courtyard was brilliantly illuminated, and presented an animated appearance. Cabs and carriages by the score were passing in and out, taking up and setting down supper parties and residents for the hotel. It was evident that my companion was well known and respected, for he was treated by the hall servants with the most obsequious respect.

"Would you prefer to have our meal served in my private room, or shall we take it in the restaurant?" he asked, when we had surrendered our hats and coats to the attendant.

“The restaurant by all means,” I replied, “unless you have any objection.”

“On the contrary, I personally prefer it,” he returned.

We accordingly entered the great hall where all was light and brightness, pretty women with their attendant cavaliers, and a never-ceasing babel of voices, popping of corks, and clattering of knives and forks. A party in an excellent position were just leaving, and we were fortunate enough to obtain their table. My companion evidently knew what he was about, for the meal he ordered was so far as I could judge, not having had much experience in these matters, perfect of its kind. In the bright light of the room I was able to study him more carefully. As I have already said, he was a handsome man, but it struck me that he looked better with his hat on than without it. His eyes were dark and piercing, but set, to my thinking, a little too close together. His chin was a strong one, and betokened considerable determination; but what struck me more than anything else about him was the smallness of his hands. They were scarcely bigger than a woman's, and quite as white. I found him a brilliant conversationalist, which is

more than can be said of the majority of Australian Squatters. He seemed to have been everywhere and to have seen everything.

After supper we adjourned to his own room where he showed me many photographs of his Australian property. The small hours were upon us before I bade him "Good-night," but not before I had arranged that he should lunch with me on the morrow.

"I shall be delighted," he said. "And I count myself fortunate indeed in having met you."

I returned the compliment, and then left the hotel to return to my own abode, feeling that he and Farrington were the two most interesting men it had ever been my good fortune to meet.

In addition to lunching together we visited a music hall in the evening. On each occasion I found him the same delightful companion. By the end of the week we might have known each other for years.

On the morning of the third day that I had known him I was preparing to go out when a waiter came up to inform me that a gentleman was in the smoking-room who

desired to see me. The silly fellow had not asked his name, but believing it to be Armitage I hastened down to meet him. My astonishment may be imagined when it proved to be none other than little Wiseman, the Skipper of the *Hullket*. He hastened forward to greet me with great effusiveness.

“My dear fellow,” he said, “I cannot tell you how pleased I am to see you. You beat us on the run home after all.”

“As you see,” I observed, “the brig sails like a witch. I suppose you got my letter that I sent to the office.”

“I received it last night,” he answered. “By the way, what have you been doing up there?”

I told him, and I thought he would never stop laughing.

“It will do him good,” he said at last. “And what have you done with the young lady?”

I told him where she was, that is to say, I gave him to understand that she was staying with friends on the river, but did not give him the address, for I did not want him to go down there, knowing from experience what a small amount of tact he possessed.

I then enquired what he had done with the knives and the photograph.

"They are still on board," he said. "I was going to take them up to the office to-day, but they say they don't want to have anything to do with the matter, so I scarcely know how to act."

"I'll tell you what you had better do then. Hand them over to me. I'll give you a receipt for them, and also communicate with the police. I have made up my mind to take the matter up, and to endeavour to solve the mystery that envelopes that poor girl."

"You shall have them with pleasure," was his reply. "But when you say you are going to solve this mystery, I think you will find that you have got a bigger work before you than you anticipate."

"Well, we shall see," I remarked. "But I want those things as soon as I can have them."

"Come down to the ship and have lunch; we are lying in the East India docks, and I'll hand them over to you, and be glad to be rid of them. I have felt a cold shiver run down my back every time I opened the safe door."

“Well, I don’t know about lunch,” I said, “for I have invited a friend to lunch with me—an Australian, and a very good fellow.”

“Bring him too,” cried the hospitable little man, who liked nothing better than showing off his ship. “He might enjoy the experience.”

“That’s not half a bad idea. We will walk along to his hotel and pick him up.”

We were saved that trouble, however, for when we entered the hall the man himself came in at the front door. I introduced Wiseman to him, and could see that he could scarcely repress a smile at the monkeyish little figure before him.

“I accept your invitation with pleasure,” he said. “You have just returned from Australia, I understand.”

“Sydney to London, sir,” said the Captain. “Sydney to London, and a good passage, but for the Doldrums and an unfortunate incident which compelled us to put in to Las Palmas. My friend Bramwell here beat me hollow with a derelict brig we picked up. A most romantic but horrible story.”

I signed to him to hold his tongue, for I

had no desire that the story should get into the newspapers and perhaps frighten Miss Alexandra, or at any rate give warning to the villains who committed the deed that their crime had been discovered. Fortunately he had the good sense to see the folly of his act in time, and to suppress his narrative before any harm was done. We accordingly proceeded to Fenchurch Street and took the train to Blackwall. When we reached the old hooker they were hard at work getting the cargo out of her, under the direction of the chief mate.

"She doesn't show to the greatest advantage at such a time as this," said the Skipper, who was jealous of his vessel's reputation, "but I defy you to find her superior when once we're at sea. Come below, gentlemen, and let me offer you some refreshment after our journey."

He led the way to the cuddy, in which all the furniture was now swathed in brown holland. Thence we proceeded to his cabin, where he bade us seat ourselves. Armitage gazed around him with well simulated interest, though, of course, in his travels he must have seen hundreds of such places before. Half an hour later luncheon was

served, and we sat down to it. That disposed of, we returned to the Captain's cabin again for cigars.

"By the way, Bramwell," said the owner of the apartment, when we had all lit up, "I may as well give you that packet while I think of it."

He went to his safe and unlocked it, and from a drawer in the bottom took out the packet that we had sealed up together on that memorable day. From the gingerly way in which he handled it I gathered something of the dislike he entertained for it.

"Take it," he said, "and write me a receipt for it. You will find paper, pens and ink on that table."

I sat down and did as he requested. When I had signed it, I handed it to him, and he read it through as carefully as if it had been a receipt for the Crown jewels.

"That document," he said, folding it up carefully, "will be worth preserving. You will agree with me, I think, Mr. Armitage, when I tell you that it contains knives with which a murder was committed on the high seas, and—a photograph of the murdered man."

“How very interesting?” said Armitage.

“Oh, but that’s not all. There’s more to follow. There was a beautiful girl upon the vessel, and our friend Bramwell here brought her home without a chaperone to keep her eye upon him. There must really be a sequel, and we’ll all dance at the wedding.”

I could have kicked the little fool with the greatest pleasure. As I have already said, he had no tact, not even enough to cover a pin’s head, as the saying goes. I had warned him once, but it had no effect upon him. I think he saw that he had made a mistake, for he looked rather shamefacedly at me.

“Is it permissible to inspect these gruesome relics?” asked Armitage.

I should liked to have answered in the negative, but since he knew all about them, owing to the Skipper’s indiscretion, there was no reason that he should not inspect them. I therefore broke the seal, unwrapped the second packet, and exposed the two knives and the camera containing the awful negative. Armitage was not as timid as the Skipper, for he picked up the knives and scrutinized them carefully.

“If they could speak,” he said, “I have no doubt they could tell a gruesome story.”

He placed them back in the paper, and then I made up the packet again and tied it as before.

“When I have done with the camera, I’ll return it to you, Wiseman, at the office, and get you to send it back to its owner.”

He promised to do so, and then after a stroll round the vessel, Armitage and I took our departure. Never for a moment did I let that precious parcel out of my hands, but balanced it on my knee throughout the return journey. It was not until we were alone in the carriage that he referred in any way to the story we had told him.

Then he said. “Do you know, Bramwell, I have been thinking over the affair of which these articles are the sole remaining relics. It’s the most atrocious, cold-blooded business I have ever heard of, and if you ask my opinion, I will say that I do not believe for a moment that it was the work of mutineers, but that it was a Vendetta of some sort.”

“What makes you think that?” I enquired,

for I must confess the idea had not occurred to me. I had become fully persuaded that it was the result of a mutiny.

“Well, in the first place, had it been a mutiny they would have scuttled the ship and not have taken the trouble to furl their sails; then again, the fact that the man was pinned down on the deck does not look like the work of a pack of rough seamen, who, in all probability, would either have stabbed him or have knocked him on the head with a belaying pin, and then have thrown the body overboard. What puzzles me in the case is their treatment of the young lady, and what relationship did she bear to the murdered man.”

“Heaven alone knows,” I answered, a trifle testily I am afraid, for I did not like to think that there was any relationship at all between them. “But I am going to find out,” I continued. “If it costs me all I have got in the world I’ll probe the mystery.”

“I admire your pluck, upon my word I do,” he said enthusiastically. “If my services are of any use to you, you are heartily welcome to them. Two heads are often better than one, and I have had some experience in my time that might prove of service. What’s more, I’m not like our friend, the Captain, in one

respect at least ; I can be trusted to hold my tongue."

A sudden impulse caused me to say "I accept your offer in the spirit you make it." And so the compact was settled.

CHAPTER IX

ON bidding Armitage "Good-bye" at the entrance to his hotel, and having thanked him again for the generous offer of his help, I returned to my own caravanserai. When I arrived there, I went straight to my room and locked myself in. Then placing the packet I had brought with me from the ship on the table, I cut the strings and opened it. The knives I wrapped up in several pieces of brown paper, which I sealed and wrote my name upon. After which I wrapped up the camera and took both downstairs with me. The packet containing the knives I took to the manager's office with the request that he would place it in the safe. Then, taking up the other, I proceeded into the Strand, hailed a cab, and bade him drive me to a shop I had seen that morning, on the windows of which it was stated that a dark room was provided for

amateurs on payment of a moderate fee. I paid the amount in question, and was conducted to the room. Then, with what feelings you may imagine, I broke the seals, turned the key, which had been fastened to the handle, and opened the case. With the utmost care I commenced my grizzly task, doing one at a time, and watching the gradual development with anxious eyes. To my horror the first was a complete failure. In my nervousness I must have under-exposed it. The second was somewhat better, but by no means as good as I could wish. The next was an improvement, and to my joy the remaining three were all that I could desire. Not being able, of course, to leave them to dry upon the premises, I was compelled to resort to artificial means, which necessitated a long wait in that stuffy hole, which was but little bigger than a cupboard. At last, however, after an imprisonment that had lasted upwards of two hours, I was satisfied that they were in a condition to take them away, I placed them in the box I had bought in the shop for that purpose, closed the camera, and released myself from what had been in every sense of the word a *durance vile*. On my way through the shop I purchased the requisites for toning and printing, which I

ordered to be sent to my hotel without fail that afternoon. The camera I took with me to my room, but the plates, which were carefully wrapped up, sealed, and plainly marked with my name, went into the safe with the knives. This done, I determined to try and forget the matter until the morrow. I had had enough of it for one day.

Next morning proved to be fine, and immediately after breakfast I once more bothered the patient clerk to open the safe, and, having obtained both packets, I made up my mind to retire to my room and to satisfy myself as to the result of my labours. The first three negatives I utterly destroyed by washing the film off the glass. Of each of the others I printed a dozen copies. The toning and washing I postponed until I should retire to rest that night.

On descending to the hall I found a letter addressed to me in the small tremulous writing of the old school. As I had not another female correspondent in England, I gathered that it was from Mrs. Jackson, and this proved to be the case. She wrote to thank me for the money I had sent her, and to inform me that her charge seemed quite to have settled down. Much to the old lady's delight she

seemed to have taken a fancy to herself and her daughter, and to derive pleasure from their society.

“I am endeavouring to persuade her,” she went on, “to employ her time with needlework, hoping that this may distract her thoughts, but I regret to say, that so far, I have been unsuccessful. It would seem as if she is incapable of any sustained effort, though her bodily strength seems all that could be desired. She has spoken of you on several occasions by name, which induces me to believe that her memory is capable of recording impressions of recent date, but of nothing connected with the tragedy which so nearly cost her her life. Perhaps we should be thankful for this.”

The old lady concluded by saying that they trusted soon to see me. All things considered, the report was as satisfactory as could be expected in so short a time. The pleasure I derived from the fact that she had remembered my name and had spoken of me, gave me exquisite pleasure. I suppose that men will do such things when they are in love, but I know that I read that portion of the letter over and over again. Before I put it away I made a mental resolution that I would go down and call on the following

afternoon. There was nothing to prevent it, so I patted myself on the back, and told myself that I deserved a treat, and was entitled to take one. Before I did so, however, I had an important matter to see to, and that was to place the negatives and the balance of the photographs I had taken in a place of safety, where they could remain for a length of time. It was within the bounds of possibility that the hotel clerk, in handing out a package, might make a mistake and give mine. I determined to take them to my bank and have them placed in security there. The knives I kept with me, as I wished to examine them more closely.

On leaving the bank, which was in Lombard Street, I drove to Armitage's hotel, for I was anxious to show him the pictures, and have a long talk with him prior to going down to Hampton Court. I enquired for him in the hall, and was informed that he was in his sitting room, for the hall porter had seen him go up the grand staircase half an hour before.

"I'll call a man to show you up, sir," he said.

But I told him that he need not worry, as I could find my way to the room by this

time. I accordingly got into the lift and was carried up to the third floor.

Armitage's bedroom and sitting-room were at the end of the corridor, and looked out over the embankment. On the heavy pile carpet of the passage my feet made no sound. I knocked upon the door, and hearing some ejaculation from Armitage, took it to be "come in," so I entered. As I did so, I heard him say, "you cursed fool, before you've done you will ruin everything."

It was easy to see that he was in a towering rage about something. His usually handsome face was black with passion. If human eyes can dart sparks his were certainly doing so at that moment. Cringing before him was as miserable a little Jew as ever disgraced a synagogue. He was metaphorically washing his hands and staring up at his tall companion as if he expected every moment to receive a blow. Never have I witnessed anything more despicable.

"My dear fellow, I did not know you were engaged," I began; "I'll come back in a quarter of an hour. I am sorry I interrupted you."

"No, no, don't go," he said heartily, his

whole manner changing as if by magic. "I have finished my business, and was only administering what schoolboys call 'a jolly good wiggling.'" Then turning to the Jew he said angrily, but by no means so fiercely as he had previously spoken, "Be off about your business, and don't you ever try to play any tricks like that with me again, or you will find that it will be the worse for you."

The miserable little wretch slunk out of the room like a whipped cur, leaving Armitage and I alone together. He held out his hand to me.

"I'm awfully sorry that you should have seen me in such a rage," he began, "but that man would exasperate a saint. I put him on to buy some things to be sent out to one of my Stations, and now I find that he has not only been swindling me, but also swindling the man from whom he was to purchase them. I happened to hear of it in a roundabout way, and I don't think he will forget in a hurry the talking-to he has earned for himself by his duplicity. But don't let us talk about that; tell me about yourself. You have made no progress, I suppose, since I left you yesterday?"

"I have developed the negatives, and I suppose that may be counted as some sort of progress. It was tiring work, but the result is eminently satisfactory." I took one of the copies from my pocket-book, and handed it to him. He studied it carefully for upwards of a minute.

"Well," he said at last, "I can only say that it is about the nastiest picture that ever I saw in my life. But I am afraid it is not going to afford any sort of clue. With such an expression of agony upon the face, the likeness will most certainly be irrerecognisable. What do you think yourself?"

"I am not quite so sure of it myself," I answered. "I think I can form, having seen the man and having his photograph to refresh my memory, a very good idea of what the fellow was like."

"That's fortunate," Armitage continued. "If only we could get hold of some clue as to the identity of the vessel. But you say that every trace had been removed."

"Every one," I replied. "Jackson, the chief mate, and I spent a large portion of our time searching her but could find nothing."

"Which only confirms my theory that it

was not a case of mutiny. If ever you do find him, you will discover that I am right."

"I have told you repeatedly," I said almost angrily, "that I have made up my mind to bring the villains to justice, if it is possible for a human being to do it."

"I admire your determination," he answered, "and, as I have already said, on my side, I will render you any assistance in my power. It will be hard if between us we cannot hit upon some plan of running the dogs to earth. Where is the vessel now?"

"At Plymouth, I suppose," was my reply. "But I will find out this afternoon."

He lit a cigarette and then asked me how I proposed to find out, seeing that I did not know her name, and I had quarrelled with the *Hullket* firm. I then told him of my intended visit to Hampton Court that afternoon. It was almost certain that Mrs. Jackson would have heard from her son, who would tell her of his movements.

"And you will see the charming young lady whose rescuer you were?" he said, looking at me out of half closed eyes, and blowing a cloud of smoke through his nose.

“That is one of my reasons for going,” I remarked. “I am anxious to see what this little rest has done for her.”

“I hope at some future time you will permit me the honour of making her acquaintance.”

“Doubtless you will see her before very long. I have several things to do, and I want to catch the half-past two train down.”

I *did* catch the train, and an hour later was standing before the fire in the pretty little drawing-room of Acacia Villa, awaiting the coming of my hostess. Presently she entered the room, leaning upon her stick. She greeted me warmly, and begged me to draw a chair up to the fire, as the afternoon was cold.

“Alexandra will be here in a few moments,” she said. “Short though the time has been I think you will see a little change in her.”

She had hardly said this before the door opened and the girl herself entered the room. I could scarcely suppress an exclamation of surprise as I looked at her. You must remember that, so far, I had not seen her well dressed. Now she was attired in a costume

of some dark grey material, which showed off her shapely figure to perfection. Nothing could have suited her better. She knew me at once and gave me her little hand with charming grace. Though she was still far from being herself, it seemed to me that there really was an improvement. There was still the melancholy absorbed look in her eyes, but it was not so marked as it had been when we left the ship. She became more animated when I enquired how she liked Hampton Court. She had seen all there was to be seen, and declared that she would never tire of visiting the Palace. I told her that I must get her to show me over it, whereupon kindly Mrs. Jackson suggested that we should go that afternoon.

“You will have plenty of time to walk through the galleries before it grows dark. Run away and put on your things, my dear.”

She did as she was bid, and in about five minutes returned dressed for walking. While she had been absent I had learned from Mrs. Jackson that her son was still in charge of the ship at Plymouth, and that he did not know when he should be able to leave her.

“Now, be off with you,” she said, “and

don't let me see either of you until half-past four, when we will take tea."

You may guess for yourself how much I enjoyed the walk and the stroll through those quaint old rooms. I was surprised to find how much my companion knew about the pictures. We were passing through one of the stately rooms which overlooks the Gardens and the Long Water when she led me to one of the pictures and stood gazing at it as if she could not take her eyes off it. Personally, not being a connoisseur of such matters, I could not see much in it, but it seemed to exercise a strange fascination over her.

"Oh, what would Canti say could he see it?" I heard her murmur.

Scarcely thinking what I was saying, and speaking in a casual tone, I enquired who Canti might be.

"He was my master in Florence—Bartolomeo Canti."

She spoke without looking round, and then resumed her contemplation of the picture. Then the magnitude of the discovery I had made burst in upon me, and I felt as if I could have shouted for joy. Quite by chance I had stumbled on one little clue. If Canti

were in the land of the living, I would have him out and see what he could tell me about her. I tried to question her further about him, but her memory had gone again, and my efforts were of no avail.

Having exhausted the Galleries, inspected the Courtyard, and strolled through the Gardens, we found it was time to return to Acacia Villa. We were passing through the Fountain Courtyard, which was now almost dark in the cloisters, when a curious thing happened. Standing in one of the doorways was a man, and I was prepared to swear that he was none other than the miserable little individual whom I had heard Armitage rating so thoroughly that morning. The glimpse I caught of him was such a momentary one that I had passed the door before I had properly realized the fact. Then I stepped back and looked in. There was no one there, however. I took the liberty of stepping inside and looking about me, but all I could see was an old chest and some ancient stairs, which turned abruptly to the right after a few steps. The floor was of stone and the stairs were uncarpeted; one would therefore have thought that it would have been impossible for the fellow to have got away without

making a noise, particularly as I had not walked more than a yard. I rejoined my companion feeling more mystified than I can say. I was as certain that I had seen him as I could well be of anything; yet the facts of the case seemed to be against me. I am afraid our conversation flagged on the homeward journey. My companion was not talkative at the best of times, while I had enough on my mind to afford me food for reflection. Was it only chance that had brought the fellow down to Hampton Court; had he business with the residents of that portion of the Palace, or lastly, was he following me? The last thought rather disquieted me. For the time being, however, I dismissed it from my mind, and devoted myself to the task of amusing the ladies. As before, I was easily persuaded to remain to dinner. When Mrs. Jackson and I were alone together I enquired whether she had made any progress in inducing Miss Alexandra to take up some hobby.

“If you mean by that, needlework, I am sorry to say I have not,” was her reply. “But she has a hobby in which she is singularly proficient. Really, Mr. Bramwell, she paints most beautifully. I am sure she

would make a name for herself in the world of art."

"Has she ever told you where she studied?" I asked.

"No. She always declares that she cannot remember. But I have an idea it must have been abroad. She is now engaged copying a picture in the Palace Gallery, and you must make her show it to you."

"I will certainly ask her to do so," I rejoined, and when she came downstairs I made my request to her.

Obedient as usual, she left the room to return in a few moments with a canvas in her hand. Though the picture was in a quite unfinished state I recognised it as a copy of that before which she had stood so long that afternoon. Little though I know of such things, I could tell that her talent was of no mean order. I handed it back and thanked her for showing it to me.

Our dinner that evening was a more cheerful one than on the previous occasion. Miss Janet was in excellent spirits, while I did my best to second her efforts. Now and again the old lady told anecdotes of her youth. Miss Alexandra, however, though she appeared

to be listening, scarcely uttered a word, save when spoken to. When we returned to the drawing-room Miss Janet played and sang to us, and at half-past nine I rose to say "Good-night."

"I hope we shall see you again very soon," said my hostess. "You know that you will always be welcome."

"I am afraid not for a week or two," I answered, and then added, watching Miss Alexandra's face as I spoke, "I am thinking of leaving to-morrow for Florence."

My remark seemed to have no effect upon her. Her expression was as impassive as if she had never heard the name.

"Surely this is rather a sudden resolution, is it not, Mr. Bramwell?" asked Mrs. Jackson.

"I am rather prone to act on impulse," I remarked. "Florence is a city I have always longed to visit, and as I have some rather particular business to transact there, and may have a lot to do later on, I thought I would take advantage of the opportunity and go now."

They wished me a pleasant journey, and having promised to let them know my address when I reached my destination, I bade them

“Good-night,” and made my way into the hall. Miss Janet followed me, and while I was putting on my great coat, opened the door for me. As I was about to pass out she took an envelope from her pocket and held it out to me.

“This is a little present for you, Mr. Bramwell,” she said. “I hope you will like it, but don’t look at it until you get into the train.”

I thanked her and promised that I would not.

It was a wild, wet night, and for this reason I lost no time in reaching the railway station.

Having selected a smoking carriage I lit a cigar, and then taking the envelope from my pocket, opened it with some curiosity. It was a photograph of Miss Alexandra—and an excellent likeness. She could not have given me anything that I should value more.

Wondering whether I could obtain a paper I leant out of the window in search of a newsboy. At the same moment a man, who, from his appearance, should have been soaked to the skin, passed the carriage. He looked up and saw me, gave a start of astonish-

ment, and passed quickly on to a compartment further up the train.

I had not been mistaken after all. It was the man I had seen in Armitage's room that morning!

CHAPTER X

I CANNOT say that I passed a pleasant night after my visit to Hampton Court. That there was something going on which I did not understand I felt sure, and the fact that I could not do so worried me beyond measure. I tumbled and tossed in my bed hour after hour, vainly trying to discover a reason for it all. One thing, however, was quite certain, and that was, that until my mind was set at rest I would not avail myself of Armitage's proffered assistance, however desirous he might appear of helping me. Before I went any further, I wanted to know what the connection was between himself and the little wretch who had followed me that evening. The excuse he had given me for rowing him struck me as ridiculous in the extreme, and only added to my suspicions. Was it

possible that this mysterious business could have anything to do with the crime that had been perpetrated on board the brig? But I put the notion from me as absurd. In the first place, it was not likely that a gentlemanly man like Armitage would be concerned in such a dastardly act, and if he had, how could he possibly have known that I had any knowledge of the affair at all? Again, another argument. The proofs had been so carefully disguised, the identity of the vessel so carefully concealed, that he must have known that he could laugh the idea of detection to the winds. But in that case, and here the old argument came up again, what possible reason could he have for putting his man on to shadow me? At last, being quite unable to make head or tail of it, I gave up consideration of the matter for the time being, and devoted myself to thinking over my journey to Florence, whither I intended to proceed by the early train on the following morning. That I was running the risk of imperilling my own happiness by proceeding in search of the mysterious Bartolomeo Canti I was quite aware, for who could say what he might reveal to me. Prior to my discovering her

on the brig in such dire misery, the life of the girl I loved was a sealed book to me. For aught I knew to the contrary she might already be married. The fact that she wore no wedding ring counted for nothing. It might have been stolen from her by the murderers of the man we had found on deck. However, let it be for good or ill, I was resolved to carry the matter through. So to Florence I would go, willy-nilly.

By eight o'clock the kit bag I intended to take with me was packed, the remainder of my luggage was handed over to the care of the manager, the knives were once more reposing in the safe, and I was hard at work upon my breakfast. All that remained afterwards was to settle my bill and then be off to the station.

Having taken my ticket, I obtained a supply of papers and books to amuse me on the road, and then sought a carriage. So far as I could judge, it did not appear to be a full train, and I was glad to think that in all probability I should have my compartment to myself. I was destined to be disappointed, however, for at the very last moment, just as the train was in the act

of starting, a porter threw open the door and a dapper little man, evidently French, immaculately dressed, and carrying a rug over his arm, jumped in. Before seating himself he bowed politely to me, and wished me "Good-morning." I returned the salutation, but with no good grace. He did not seem to notice it, but exchanging his silk hat for a cap, lit a cigar and settled himself down for the journey. Between Charing Cross and Dover we conversed once or twice, but seeing that my French was unintelligible, while his English was if anything worse, we did not make much headway.

At length we reached Dover, and made our way on board the steamer. It was by no means a nice morning, and there was a good sea running, which I gathered would prove disastrous for more than one of my fellow passengers. I heard my companion from London utter a groan as he looked at it, and well he might, for we had not been steaming a quarter of an hour before he was completely *hors-de-combat*. Poor fellow, he presented a pitiable spectacle, and alas! he was not the only one. They were lying about in all directions, and each one looked

as if they never expected to reach the French coast alive. Only once have I experienced it, but that was sufficient to last me a lifetime.

At last we reached Paris, only to push on again in due course upon my adventurous journey. Forty hours after leaving London found me at my destination, and very glad to be there, even though I did arrive there in the middle of the night, to find no cab available, and still more difficult, to discover my hotel. Of all the big cities of the world that are deficient in cab accommodation, Florence is one of the worst. However, I managed at length to discover a more than usually intelligent native, who not only was acquainted with the caravanserai I wanted, but who was also willing, for an extortionate sum, not only to conduct me thither, but most wonderful thing of all, to carry my bag. I engaged his services upon the spot, and we set off upon one of the loneliest peregrinations it has ever been my ill fortune to undertake. The rascal had not understood my meaning after all, and led me up one street and down another until I was nearly driven desperate. The old saying that it is a long lane that has turning, was never truer than in my

case, for just when I was beginning to feel as if I could murder him, we turned into a broad thoroughfare. There was the hotel itself, with the name above the door. I took my bag, rewarded my guide with money and bad language, and then made my presence known to the authorities of the hotel. I had warned them by telegram of my coming, so that they were prepared to receive me. I was shown to my room at once, turned into one of the hardest beds I have ever known, and slept like a top until nine o'clock.

When I had breakfasted after the English fashion, I asked to see the manager, and was shown to his office. He was a fat, greasy little fellow, with jet black eyes and hair, and an enormous double chin. Fortunately for me, he spoke sufficient English to be able to understand what I said, and he was good enough to assure me that anything he could do to assist me should be done. His method of expressing himself is beyond me, so that with your permission I will reduce it as far as possible to plain English. I informed him that I had travelled from London in order to endeavour to discover the whereabouts of a certain teacher of paint-

ing, whose name was Bartolomeo Canti, and I assured him of my gratitude should he be able to give me any information concerning him. But he only shrugged his shoulders, spread out his hands and vowed that, gladly as he would do so, it was not in his power. I gathered from what he said that, since he was not able to help me, he would never know happiness again. Then an idea struck him, he started melodramatically, placed one fat finger to his forehead, and going to the door called "Andrea."

A few moments later a tall, gaunt individual made his appearance, bowed to me, and then to his master, after which an animated conversation ensued. I thought it was never going to cease, but at last it did so, and the manager turned to me and informed me that the illustrious Signor Canti had a college for the art of painting in a street the name of which I cannot for the life of me remember. I asked him to convey my thanks to Andrea, who thereupon bowed with the air of a Court chamberlain and withdrew.

I then asked the manager whether he could introduce me to any Englishman or Italian who could speak both languages sufficiently

well to act as an interpreter. He pondered on the question, and at last asked for time to think it over. At the end of an hour he might be able to find me just the man I wanted.

I went for a walk, and when I returned found that he had been successful. What the man's nationality was I don't think he could have told you, but he spoke both languages as to the manner born. I engaged him on the spot, and we set off for the street to which Andrea had directed us. From its appearance the maistre would not seem to have been very successful, and I could not imagine Miss Alexandra working in such a place.

After repeated hammerings upon the door, and just as we were beginning to lose patience, a withered old crone opened it to us, so shrivelled and ugly was she that she might very well have sat to the painter for the Witch of Endor. My interpreter entered into conversation with her, to which she replied in a voice that was like the sharpening of a saw. The upshot of it all was that the man we were in search of had discovered that he was too old to continue to work, had sold the school, and purchased a villa in the suburbs of the city.

Having rewarded her, we left her and went in search of a vehicle in which to drive to the place in question, which my guide informed me, was distant some three and a half miles.

When we had secured a Jehu we set off, and in due course reached the place in question. It was a pretty little spot, of the usual Italian type, shut in by cypresses, larches, and evergreen oaks, with of course the inevitable olive. We entered, and this time made enquiries of an elderly man servant, who, with many gesticulations, informed us that the illustrious Signor Canti was at that moment taking the air in his garden. If we would be pleased to follow him, he would be honoured to conduct us.

We did so, and were led down a cypress bordered walk towards a small summer house, before which an old man with grey hair, and wearing a velvet coat, was hobbling up and down, supported by a stick. As it soon appeared, he did not hear us, being well-nigh as deaf as a post. At length my interpreter was able to make him understand the reason of my intrusion on his privacy. I took the photograph from my pocket and handed it to

the interpreter, with the request that he would ask the old gentleman whether he could remember the original.

Having produced his spectacles he examined it carefully, and then suddenly throwing up his hands, as if in astonishment, he said something excitedly to my companion. That he *had* recognised her was evident from his excitement, which was only equalled by my own. Why didn't he speak? I was in a fever of impatience. I implored the interpreter to hurry him.

An animated conversation ensued. At last my man turned to me.

"She was the best pupil he ever had, he says, and her name, so far as I can understand him, was Angela Carbridge, but he says that if you will accompany him into the house, he will show you one of her pictures with her signature upon it. He has also a photograph of her, taken in Florence, two years ago."

"Tell him that I will accompany him only too gladly," I hastened to say. And as we made our way along the path towards the villa, I murmured to myself, over and over again, "Angela Carbridge, Angela Carbridge." I liked the name better than that of Alexandra,

and it seemed to fit her soft beauty better than any other could do.

When we reached the house he invited us to enter, and conducted us to a room on the right, the walls of which were literally covered with paintings. Passing to one at the further end he pointed to it with his stick and said something to my companion.

“He wishes to tell you that that is the picture, and that you will find her name upon it.”

I stepped forward and examined it. In the left hand corner was the name “Angela Carbridge.” It was a beautiful picture, and of just the type I should have imagined she would have painted.

While I was examining it, he was searching in a handsomely carved old desk for what eventually proved to be an album containing the portraits of some hundreds of his pupils. At length he found it, and hobbling across the room, placed it upon the table. So poor was his eyesight that, when he leant over it, his nose well-nigh touched the page. At last he came upon what he wanted, and signed to me to look. It was she, there could be no doubt about that. But in

this photograph there was no sign of sadness, no premonition of the sorrow that was to come. I would have given anything for it, but the old man would have been insulted had I asked him for it. I told the interpreter to enquire whether the old gentleman knew what had become of her, but he only shook his head sadly, and then striking the table with his fist, burst into a torrent of speech. When he had finished, the interpreter began.

“He can tell you nothing, he says, but that she left him suddenly and without warning. He believes that she was the victim of treachery, and that, old as he is, could he meet the man, he would kill him with his own hands.”

“Tell him that I will stake my life on her purity,” I cried passionately.

“He says that he believes in her as much as the Signor does.”

“Has he any idea who the man was?”

He shook his head.

But the other pupils asserted that there was a man in the case.

“Is there any pupil who said so living in Florence?” I asked.

But it appeared that there was not. They

had drifted all over the world. Some were in Paris, some in Berlin, some in Vienna. Many had gone back to America, and some to England. On hearing this, you may be sure that I pricked up my ears, and enquired whether he would give me the name and address of one of them.

This took some time to find, but eventually he was successful, and I wrote it in my pocket-book. "Miss Matheson, Belgrave Studios, Fulham Road." I resolved to call upon Miss Matheson immediately I reached London. There was another in Lancashire, but the old gentleman did not seem quite certain whether she was studying under him at the time. I thanked the old gentleman most heartily for the assistance he had rendered me. He begged that I would not do anything of the kind, that it was an honour for him that I should ask his assistance, particularly that I should come such a long distance to do so. He then enquired whether I could give him any news of his old pupil. And when I informed him that she was in London, painting as well as ever, and that she had mentioned his name to me, tears rose in the old man's eyes and coursed down his cheeks.

Before leaving he insisted that I should partake of his hospitality, and begging me to excuse him, left the room, to return a few minutes later with a flask of wine, his old servant following him with glasses.

After the dusty drive we had had, it was exceedingly refreshing. Then bidding him "adieu" we proceeded to the cab. As we drove along I turned over in my mind what I had heard, and felt my anger rising again at the thought of any imputation being brought against the woman I had learnt to love. On reaching the hotel I paid off the cabman and the interpreter, rewarding the latter liberally for the work he had done for me. He received my praise and largess with the air of a man conscious of having done his duty as no other could do it, and with a sweep of his hat, bowed me a farewell.

The evening was an oppressive one, and not caring to remain indoors with nothing but my own thoughts to occupy me, I put on my hat, lit a cigar, and determined to go for a stroll.

It was a beautiful moonlight night, and the old city looked very picturesque in the mellow light, and having learnt by this time to pro-

nounce the name of my hotel, and the street in which it was situated, I thought I might rely with some sort of security on reaching it once more. So I rambled on, as the fancy took me, gradually passing from the more aristocratic quarter of the city into the poorer part.

At last I thought it was time to retrace my steps, only to discover that it was not quite so easy as I supposed. The first two or three turnings were comparatively easy, for they were fresh in my memory, but after that I found myself hopelessly fogged, as much so as a new chum in Australia who gets bushed in a mallee scrub. I repeated the name of my hotel and the street in which it was situated to several passers-by, but they either did not understand me or they were too sulky to reply, knowing that I was a foreigner. However, I believed that I knew the direction in which the river flowed, and I determined to try for that and run it along until I came to a part with which I was acquainted.

Trusting to my luck I set off again, but though it seemed as if I had walked miles I was no nearer home than before. I paused again to consider, and as I did so the

sound of stealthy steps behind me caught my ear. I wheeled round, and as I did so, a knife flashed in the moonlight, and a cord encircled my neck. I had had that game played on me before and knew exactly what to do.

Before it could be pulled tight my right foot was in the fellow's stomach and the cord was in my hand. The other rushed at me with the knife, but he hadn't time to use it before I had him by the wrist from the inside. It broke like a piece of dry stick. A good lead off with the left under the jaw laid him upon his back and gave me time to examine his friend, who was being very sorry for himself upon the ground.

"A pretty pair you are," I observed. "It's no fault of yours that I am alive at this minute. Turn over, my friend with the stomachache, and let me have a look at your handsome countenance. Great Scot!"

He was none other than my dapper friend, the man who had got into the railway carriage at Charing Cross, and who had been so seasick on the way to Calais.

I then crossed to the other man, who was still unconscious. He, however, proved to be a stranger.

“If you don’t mind, my friend,” I observed, “I’ll take possession of this pretty little pen-knife of yours, and I’ll go through your pockets to see if I can find any document bearing upon this case.”

I did so, but all I could discover was one letter, which I placed in my pocket to be examined later. The other fellow had nothing on him in the way of correspondence, but what was better still, he was beginning to revive. I saw my way out of my difficulty. Lifting him on to his feet by the scruff of his neck, I told him of the predicament in which I was placed in not being able to find my way back to my hotel. I told him that I wished to get there as soon as possible, and that I desired him to take me there. I showed him the knife I had taken from his friend, and informed him that I would use it on him without the least compunction if he played me any tricks.

“As we are old fellow-travellers,” I continued, “we will show our regard for each other by walking arm-in-arm. It will then be impossible for you to get away from me.”

Seeing that it was useless for them to resist he accepted the inevitable, and in less than a

quarter of an hour I was bidding him "good-night" on the doorstep, accompanied by some advice which may, or may not, have proved of service to him.

CHAPTER XI

“WHAT does it all mean?” I asked myself when I reached my room after the exciting adventure described in the last chapter. “I’d give something to know. At any rate, if my friend Armitage is at the bottom of it, I can promise him that he will hear from me.”

As I pondered on this, I took from my pocket the letter I had found on the man whose wrist I had broken. It contained only one sentence, and as that was in Italian, I was no wiser than before.

Next morning I sought an interview with the manager, and requested him to translate it for me, which he was obliging enough to do. The sentence ran as follows:—

“Make sure that he does not return to England.”

That was all. It was written in an educated hand, but whose hand it was I could not say.

You may be very sure that, until it was time for me to go to the station, I did not venture very far from the hotel. I had no desire to risk a repetition of the previous night's performance. For, though I did not think it would be repeated, I was not going to be foolhardy enough to give them an opportunity. As it was, nothing out of the common occurred.

The journey back to London was an uneventful one. No one molested me, nor did I see anything of that amiable gentleman who had been kind enough to show me the way back to my hotel on that memorable evening.

I drove from the station to my hotel, and glad was I to be back. Even the hall porter seemed like an old friend, while the pretty girl in the office received me with a smile of welcome. For the remainder of the day I did nothing, I was tired after my long journey. I found time, however, to write to Mrs. Jackson, and to inform her of my return, and asking for information concerning Miss Alexandra, for by that name I determined to call her until I should have

an opportunity of explaining matters. One other letter I wrote, and that was to Armitage, informing him of my return, and asking if he would be at home next morning. I told the messenger to wait for a reply.

In something less than a quarter of an hour he returned with a note, in which that gentleman informed me that he was rejoiced to think I was back so soon, and that he would be only too glad to see me in the morning. I sat down at the table in my room and placed his letter beside that which I had taken from the man in Florence.

“So I have caught you at last, have I?” I muttered. “I felt convinced that you were at the bottom of it.”

But how was I to connect him with the murder on the brig? That was the difficult thing to see. Still, I had made some headway, and did not despair of success.

At half-past ten next morning I betook myself to his hotel, and went upstairs to his room. He had just finished breakfast, and wore a dark blue smoking jacket. On seeing me he came forward with hands outstretched, and a pleasant smile upon his face.

"My dear fellow," he began, "I welcome your return. I have been more than lonely without you. I hope you have had a pleasant time."

From the way he spoke, and the cordiality of his manner, no one would have believed for a moment that he had done his best to murder me only a few days before. I was not, however, going to let him see that I was aware of his treachery. On the contrary, I reciprocated his good will, and enquired what he had been doing in my absence.

"Absolutely nothing," he answered, "but smoke, and read, and wander about the town. I hope your business in Florence was successful?"

"In a measure," I answered.

"And what about the Great Mystery? When do we commence operations?"

I thought it would not be long before he would touch on that subject.

"That must depend upon circumstances," I replied. "If only we could discover some sort of a preliminary clue, we might get to work at once. I have a very good mind to take a run down to Plymouth and overhaul the ship again."

"I doubt if it would be worth the trouble," he remarked. "You seem to have done it so thoroughly before."

"But one might chance upon something. A scrap of paper" (I then bethought me of the torn label that Jackson had found, the existence of which I had quite forgotten), "an old deck shoe, the most insignificant thing might afford some clue."

"Very true," he answered. "I have heard of a boot lace hanging a man, but I don't hope for such success in this case."

He then changed the subject by enquiring whether I would accompany him to a theatre that night. The man's audacity amused me so much that I consented to do so. I then bade him "good-bye," and went off to make certain purchases of which I stood in need.

As I walked along the crowded pavement I wondered whether he had yet heard of what had happened to his Florentine assassins. If he had, he had certainly not allowed me to suspect the fact. I asked myself another question. Why had he tried so hard to dissuade me from revisiting the brig? This question was soon answered, for on returning to my hotel, I found a letter awaiting me from

Jackson. In it he informed me that he had as yet received no instructions from the firm as to what was to be done with the brig, save that he was to remain on board with the crew. This he described as hard lines, seeing that he was anxious to get ashore, having been nearly nine months at sea. He thanked me for my kindness to his mother, and hoped that Miss Alexandra was going on well. Then came this startling piece of information, and I give it in his own words :

“By the way, I had a visitor yesterday, an old friend of yours, a Mr. Armitage, to whom it appears you have told the story of the brig. He was very anxious to see her, and told me that you had made him a bet that he could not discover any trace of her identity. I should say you’ve won, for though he went through her from stem to keelson, just as if he had been a professional detective, not a thing could he discover. He was very pleasant and affable, but I am afraid I couldn’t entertain him as I should like to have done. You know what the *Hullket* owners are. As a point of fact they are nearly starving us. However, he didn’t seem to mind, but took it like a real gentleman.”

“Real gentleman !” I muttered. “I wonder

what you'd say if you knew all? And so, Mr. Armitage, during my absence, you have been trying to spring another little game on me. Wanted to convince yourself, I suppose, that you had left nothing behind to give evidence against you. Well, there is an old saying that 'those laugh best who laugh last.' We'll see who *does* laugh last."

After lunch I made myself as spruce as possible, for I had an important call to pay that afternoon upon no less a person than Miss Matheson, of whom Signor Canti had spoken to me. I hailed a cab, and told him whither I wanted to be driven, at the same time bidding him pull up at the nearest telegraph station. Taking a cablegram form I wrote the following message:—

BRENDOR,

"SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA.

"Do you know any Armitage, Squatter.

"JOHN BRAMWELL."

Now Brendor was the code address of the firm with which I served prior to throwing in my lot with Farrington. Thought I to myself I shall be able to tell pretty well

when I receive their answer whether he really is the man he pretends to be, or part of the scheme that he is at present working out. I then continued my drive to the Fulham Road, and in due course found myself outside the Belgrave Studios. To be plain with you I was disappointed. From the high sounding name I had expected something much more important than the commonplace structure before me. I had never visited an artist's studio before, but from what I had read in books I had always understood that they were the most luxurious places possible—Turkey carpets, suits of armour, priceless china, handsome costumed models, and such like. The artist invariably wore a velvet coat, while his hair fell in curls upon his shoulders. I rang the bell, but no notice was taken of it; I rang again, and yet again with the same result.

“Well, they shall hear me this time,” thought I, and gave the bell such a pull that it was a wonder the whole affair did not give way. This time some attention was paid to it. The door was suddenly opened and a tall, cadaverous individual in a threadbare coat, smeared with paint, as were his hands, asked me with some very bad language

why I could not come in without making such a row? I asked if Miss Matheson had a studio there, and then thinking I would repay him in kind for his rudeness, enquired whether he worked for her. His face would have been worth a fortune to a photographer at that moment. Every hair in his scanty beard seemed to bristle with rage. He looked at me as if he were going to eat me, but eventually thought better of it, and growling "second door on the left," bounced himself into the first on the right.

"That man has not succeeded," I thought, and quite by chance some time afterwards I discovered that I was right.

Following his directions I made my way down the passage, which might certainly have been cleaner, towards the door he had indicated. I rapped upon it, whereupon a deep voice from within called upon me to enter.

Now I had imagined, I cannot say why, that the young lady in question would be young and pretty, and perhaps twenty-five years of age. I was as wrong in that conjecture as I had been in my idea of an artist's studio. There were only two people in the room, and

one of them being a lady I gathered that she was Miss Matheson. When I tell you that she was nearly forty years of age, and as broad as she was long, with a freckled face and the eyes that usually go with red hair, you will have some notion of her personal attractions. The man, who was evidently a model, was posing on a dais, the cloth covering of which was worn to rags.

She looked at me with some surprise.

"Miss Matheson?" I asked.

"That is my name. Can I do anything for you?"

"If you could spare me the favour of a few minutes' conversation with you, I shall be deeply obliged," I replied.

"May I ask if the matter is important?" she enquired.

"To me it is of the utmost importance," I remarked. "When I tell you that I have just come from Florence, where I had the pleasure of meeting Signor Canti, with whom I believe you studied, I hope it may serve as a fitting introduction."

"Ah! the dear signor," she said, with a sigh. Then turning to her model, she said, "You can go out and have some beer, Johnson. Come back in half-an-hour. I

presume you will not detain me longer than that, sir."

"I am sorry to have to detain you at all," I replied, as the model left the room.

Although her manner was not what it might have been, I don't think she had any intention of being rude.

"Won't you sit down," she said, pointing with the brush she held in her hand to a chair that I felt morally certain would collapse directly it felt my weight.

I sat down in fear and trembling, and the ominous creak that greeted my audacity did not tend to reassure me.

"I have already said, Miss Matheson," I began, "that this is a matter which concerns me very vitally. I understood from Signor Canti that you studied under him for some time?"

"Two years and five months," she answered. "A better master no one could wish to have."

"I can quite believe that. But it is not of his merit that I have come to talk to you. I understand that while you were with him a certain Miss Angela Carbridge was also one of his students. Am I right?"

She nodded.

“You are quite right,” she answered. “What of her?”

“Would you mind answering one or two questions if I put them to you? I cannot tell you how grateful I shall be to you if you will.”

“I must know what the questions are first,” said she. “I cannot pledge myself to say anything until I know that.”

“To begin with,” I said, “I should inform you that the young lady in question is in England, and in a very poor state of health. She has seen a great deal of trouble, and her memory has quite deserted her. To be brief with you, on my way home from Australia I found her alone on an abandoned ship. She could not even remember her own name, nor any of her past life. One day, however, she mentioned, quite by chance, the name of Signor Canti. I went to Florence and traced him to the villa he now occupies in the suburbs. From him I learnt that there had at one time been some talk of attention which had been paid to her by a man in Florence. Can you give me any information on this point?”

She hesitated before she replied.

“I don’t see why Signor Canti should have

brought me into the matter," she ejaculated. "I call it most unfair."

"I hope you won't think that," I hastened to say. "Your name was only one of many others. But as the rest were scattered all over the world, I called upon you as being nearest at hand."

This somewhat mollified her.

"Perhaps I know more than people imagine," she observed at last. "I have been accustomed to keep my eyes open, and though I would not for worlds pry into another's business, I cannot help seeing things, especially when they are deliberately thrust under your nose. Who the man was I do not know, nor did I ever feel any anxiety to learn. I don't think he was an Italian, though he might have passed for one. He was tall, taller than you are——"

"With black eyes and hair," I interrupted excitedly, "and very small hands."

"I did not notice his hands," she answered. "But in other respects you have described him exactly. There was one strange thing that puzzled us all," she went on, "and that was the fact that she was afraid of him, perhaps terrified would better describe it."

“Forgive my asking the questions, but what reasons have you for suspecting that?”

“Because there were certain days on which she could not paint, when she trembled like an aspen leaf, and her eyes seemed to have a haunted, frightened look that I cannot describe. Then there was another man.”

“Another?” I cried in great surprise, and such pain as I hope I may never know again. “Tell me what you mean?”

“There *was* another man,” she replied, “an ugly, I might almost say a hideous man, with a face like that of a Satyr. He followed her everywhere, and we girls all thought that, before long, these two men, who hated each other with a deadly hatred, would try to kill each other. Then she disappeared quite suddenly, leaving all her things behind her and not even saying ‘good-bye’ to the girl who shared her lodgings with her. The tall man we saw for a few days afterwards, but the Satyr we never saw again. That, sir, is all I can tell you. If her memory is gone, and she cannot recall the past, I suppose that is all that will ever be known.”

“Not quite all,” I answered. “Miss Matheson, are your nerves strong?”

"I have always been told so. What makes you ask the question?"

"Because I should like to show you a photograph. Before doing so I ought to inform you that it is a very horrible one."

"I think you may trust me," she said.

And I thereupon produced my pocket-book and took from it the photograph of the murdered man. It was not without some trepidation that I handed it to her. I need not have worried myself, however, for it was evident that it would take more than that to shake her nerves.

"That is the man of whom I told you. Contorted as the face is, I should know him anywhere. Where did this happen?"

"In mid-ocean," I replied.

She handed it back to me without another word.

"I can tell you nothing further," she said, in a strangely harsh voice.

I rose.

"Good-bye, Miss Matheson," I said, "I am very grateful to you for what you have done for me. At least, you have set my mind at rest on two points. The identity of the man in this photograph, and of the other with black hair and dark eyes. It may interest

you to know that the latter is in London now."

For the first time she showed signs of emotion. Placing her hand on my arm she said impulsively: "then, if you are her friend, save her from him, for he is the Devil himself in human shape, and if he finds her, God help her, poor girl!"

My heart sank as I remembered the day of our visit to the Palace at Hampton Court. Now I knew why the little Jew had followed me on that occasion. But Armitage, or whatever his name might be, had not got her yet, and please God, if I could prevent it, he would not get her at all.

Having no desire to return to my hotel in my present humour, to sit in the smoking room or the billiard room and hear nothing but the inane chatter of a lot of people for whom I cared nothing, I bade my cabby drive to the Park. There I paid him off and went in to wander about the almost deserted paths, my thoughts racking me meanwhile like a hundred thumb screws. Plan after plan occurred to me, but I threw them all aside as useless. I

was beginning by this time to see the character of the man I had to deal with, and with him half measures would be worse than useless.

At last, when it began to grow dusk, I left the Park and made my way along Piccadilly and the Haymarket to the Strand.

When I entered the hotel, the hall porter informed me that a gentleman had called twice to see me, and that he would call again at half-past five.

"The man's impudence passes belief," I murmured as I went upstairs, in my rage forgetting that there was such a thing as a lift. "After what I have heard to-day, and what I have discovered on my own initiative, I'll forswear his company for the future. If he's a hypocrite it shall not be said that I am. What would I not give to settle it with him, man to man?"

Bigger man than myself though he was, the justice of my cause would have stood by me, and I should have come out the victor.

I looked at my watch and discovered that it was already ten minutes past five. In twenty minutes he would be with me. My

mind was made up, I would not see him. Calling the hall porter to me I said to him, "I suppose the gentleman who called to see me this afternoon was the same who has been so often of late to see me?"

"No, sir," the man replied. "This is another gentleman. I have never seen him before."

"Very well then, I will see him," I remarked. "I shall be in the smoking room."

I went to the room in question and ordered tea to be brought to me. It braced me up more than anything else could have done, and then I laid myself back in my chair, pipe in mouth, and wondered what the next development in the business was going to be. Was this mysterious stranger going to endeavour to bribe me to return to Australia? Would he offer me a price to surrender Miss Angela, or would he endeavour to assassinate me in the presence of the bald-headed old gentleman who was slumbering peaceably before the roaring fire?

A few moments later a servant made his appearance and, seeing me, said—"A gentleman to see you, sir."

I rose from my chair to be prepared for him. Before I could say "Show him in," the stranger made his appearance.

It was Giles Farrington.

CHAPTER XII

GILES FARRINGTON was the last man in the world I expected to see. If anyone had told me that he was in England I should not have believed it. He had always told me that he was done with the Mother Country for good and all, and that nothing would induce him ever to return to her. To see him now, in the smoking room of a fashionable London hotel, almost took my breath away.

“Good Heavens! Giles,” I cried, “is this you, or your ghost?”

“Shake hands and ascertain the fact for yourself,” he answered, with the laugh that I remembered so well of old.

He held out his hand and I took it, to receive a grip that went a long way towards convincing me that he was not a member

of the spirit world. Then he clapped his hands on my shoulders, and said, "By Jove, Jack, how well you are looking old fellow, and what a thundering swell you are. And yet I remember you standing your watch among the Islands in your pyjamas, with a silk handkerchief round your neck, and bare feet."

"Well, come and sit down," I said, "and you shall tell me all about it."

We did so, and refreshments were ordered. A reckless thing to do on my part, seeing that I had only a few minutes before finished my tea. However, there are times when prudence must be thrown to the winds. This was one of them.

"Well, I'll spin my yarn first," he said, "and then you can spin yours."

"Fire away then," I said, and he set to work.

"In the first place, I am going to pay you the compliment of saying that, after you left, I felt a bit lonely. Things didn't seem to go right at all. I got a man to fill your billet, but he was such a blunderer that I had to get rid of him. Then there seemed to be nothing to do, and I began to think that I was tired of the sea and

the old life. I had business in Honolulu, so I put in there, to find a letter awaiting me which had been forwarded on from Sydney. I can't remember whether I ever told you that I did not take up the life I led out there for the sake of the money I made out of it. I could not very well have done it at the price. No; I have a bit of property in England that brings me in a fairly good income. Something had gone wrong with it, and it became necessary for me to hurry home to look after things. Now you know everything. It's not much of a story, is it, when all is said and done?"

"I don't care so much about the story," I replied, "as I do about seeing you again. I can almost imagine I see you coming up out of the companion. And, talking of that reminds me, where is the schooner?"

"Laid up, my boy, where folk won't think of looking for her. Do you think she's in Sydney harbour, lying alongside one of your handsome British Men-o'-War, in order that my duffer of a mate may invite the officers to tiffin to hear him recount his adventures? No, my lad, if they search for a hundred years they won't find her. But now, tell

me of yourself. You seem to have let me do all the talking. Remember, I know nothing of your doings save that you started away in the *Hullket*."

"Oh! I have been going through all sorts of adventures," I replied. "It was quite like the old times. I only wish you had been with me."

"I wish I had. But let me inform you that you are not getting on with the story. Fire away, man, for goodness sake, and let's hear all about it. I can remember the time when you used to be a good hand at a yarn."

I laughed as a thought struck me.

"Do you remember old Mother Tackleton at Papeete, who, when her husband came home and found that she had been at the gin bottle instead of getting his supper, and he remonstrated with her with the nearest thing handy, would observe, 'man—man—why will 'ee be so impatient?' That fits your case to a hair."

"Don't talk about the Islands," he groaned. "If you do, I shall be off at once. I have only been here two days, and I'm fairly dying to be out there again. But to business, we're wasting time."

Up to this point I had been talking against time, in order to allow the old gentleman, who was now awake, to collect his impedimenta, consisting of a spectacle case, a cigar case, and a skull cap, which had fallen off during his slumbers. Now that he was gone, I was ready to gratify my friend's curiosity.

"I was waiting for that old fellow to clear out," I said; "now that he's gone I'll tell you everything, and if it's not the strangest yarn even *you* have ever heard, may I go to sea as a steward."

I described to him in a few brief words our voyage from Sydney, up as far as the Doldrums. The sighting of the brig came next, and the Captain's giving me permission to board her. An account of her curious appearance followed in its proper course. So far I could see that he had not taken much interest in what I was telling him, but when I gave him an account of what we discovered on board, the body of the murdered man pinned out upon the deck in that fiendish manner, and the half-mad girl crouching in the corner of the cabin below, he got up and began to pace the room.

“My God!” he said, speaking through teeth that were biting deep into his cigar, “that is one of the most horrible things I have ever heard of.”

“Yes,” I continued, “and if you’d come upon it suddenly, as I did, it would have made you feel as bad as it did me. Would you like to see it now?”

He evidently thought me mad. I took out my pocket book, and from it the photograph that I was longing to destroy. He looked at it with an expression of indescribable disgust upon his face.

“How you can bear to carry the thing about with you, I cannot imagine,” he said. “It would give me a nightmare to have it in my room, and I don’t think I am more of a coward than most men. Why do you do it?”

“Because I want to run down the brutes who committed the crime, and I am on their track now like a sleuth-hound. But let us get on with my yarn.”

I told him of the condition of the ship, how every trace of her identity had been obliterated; spoke of the tidiness of the men’s quarters, the galley, and of the cabins aft; how I had offered to navigate her

home with a crew and a mate from the *Hullket*. I told him of the poor girl's sad condition, and, later on, what arrangements I had made for her.

"You're a brick, Jack," he said ; but I didn't want any compliments.

The next part of my narrative was my meeting with Armitage, the little Jew, and my adventures on the Continent.

"Well, you can't grumble because you haven't had sufficient excitement," he remarked when I had finished. "And was the young lady who you rescued pretty?"

"Judge for yourself," I returned, and handed him her portrait.

At the moment he was engaged in lighting another cigar. When he had finished, he glanced at the portrait with the interest of a man who, reading a good story, glances casually at the illustrations. Suddenly I heard him catch his breath, and his face became as pale as it was possible for it to do. He stared at the photograph as if he could not take his eyes off it.

"Good God, man!" he cried, with a fierceness that I had never seen in him before, "if this is a joke you are playing on me, I warn you that it will be the worse for you.

If it had been any other man I would have killed him."

"But, my dear fellow," I said, springing to my feet and putting my hand on his shoulder, "I am playing no joke on you. That is the photograph of the girl I found on the brig."

He was shaking like a man with the palsy, and great beads of sweat were running down his forehead. I rang the bell and bade the waiter bring me some brandy. When it came I gave it to my friend, and he tossed it off at a gulp.

"Now, Giles, for goodness sake tell me what this means," I said. "What has upset you so? You know that I would not do anything to hurt you for the world."

"I know that, old man," he replied, gripping my hand like a vice, "but—but—that girl is—is—my sister!"

There is an old saying that you can be knocked over by a feather, and I really believe that at that moment you could have done it for me. To say that I was amazed would be to express myself much too mildly. I was literally dumbfounded.

"You Miss Angela Carbridge's brother?" I stammered. "Then you're the notorious

Sir Giles Carbridge? Am I dreaming? I feel dazed."

"And well you may be," was his rejoinder. "Jack, you have saved my sister's life, saved her from the most awful death imaginable. I won't try to thank you, because this is too big a thing for thanks. She was my little playfellow when I was a big boy and she only a tiny maid. She was the only one of all the family whom I loved. When my father died and I came into the property and went to the deuce, I loved her still. And to think that those hell-hounds left her to drown in that ship. If it costs me all I have got in the world, if I have to pawn my very shirt to do it, I'll hunt them down, and may——"

But the oath he swore was too terrible for me to put down here.

"Where is she?" he asked at length. "You told me that you had found a pleasant home for her. Where is that home? I must see her at once."

"She is with friends at Hampton Court, who are taking the greatest care of her. To-morrow I will arrange that you shall see her."

"To-night," he muttered.

“No, no, not to-night,” I said firmly. “You must remember that she is by no means strong, and you must also school yourself not to be offended if she does not know you.”

He ground his teeth, and I knew of what he was thinking.

“You swear I shall see her to-morrow?”

“I’ll write to the lady she is with at once, and tell her everything. She will arrange it. And that reminds me, I must write another letter. A man asked me to dine with him to-night, and go on to a theatre afterwards. I shan’t go.”

“I’d break your neck if you thought of it,” was his reply. “I shall go along to my own hotel and bring my traps over here, and you’ll come with me. If I were left alone to-night, I believe I should go mad. Write the letters, man; write the letters, for Heaven’s sake, and let’s get away.”

I went to a writing table on the other side of the room and wrote to Mrs. Jackson, telling her what I had discovered concerning Miss Alexandra’s real name, and told her also of the arrival of her brother. I concluded by saying that, if it were quite

convenient to her, we proposed coming down in the morning for a little while to see her, as my friend was too impatient to wait until the afternoon. That finished, I wrote a brief note to Armitage, excusing myself from dining with him on the plea of an important engagement. This last I despatched by a servant, the other I posted at the letter box in the hall.

All the time that I had been writing, Giles, for I could not bring myself to call him Carbridge, having known him so long as Farrington, was pacing the room in a fever of impatience. He was a very different man then to what he had been when I commenced my story. That he had been and still was genuinely attached to his sister could be easily seen, and I did not wonder at it, for a sweeter—but there, I think you have heard all that before, so there is no need for me to repeat it.

A hansom having been procured, we drove to his hotel in Cork Street, obtained his baggage, and returned with it to my hotel. During the drive he scarcely spoke, and I did not attempt, you may be sure, to break into his train of thought. Not for a moment did I intend to tell him that the

man whom I suspected had pretended to be my intimate friend, nor that he was living not more than a couple of hundred yards from my abode. Had I done so, goodness only knows what the consequences would have been.

Fortunately, the room next my own had been vacated that afternoon, so that we were able to be side by side. We went up to dress for dinner. He was quicker than I, in fact, I was tying my tie, and not making a very good job of it, when he entered my room, and coming across to the dressing table before which I was standing, he hit me a sounding smack on the back.

"Jack," he said, "old boy, I don't know whether I have ever told you so before, but you're a damned good chap. But there's one thing I want to know, and that is, why on earth you did so much for her? She was nothing to you."

"Don't you be too sure of that," I answered, giving the bow of the tie a vicious tug.

"Eh! What?" Taking me by the shoulders he spun me round and looked me full and fair in the face. "You don't mean

it, do you? Speak up, you ruffian, or I'll strangle you."

"And what if I do?" I enquired, smoothing out my shirt front, for he had crumpled it.

"Well, all I can say is," he replied, "that——"

Well, I'm not going to tell you what he said, because I didn't deserve it, though he seemed to think I did.

Next morning, while we were at breakfast, a telegram arrived from Mrs. Jackson inviting us to come at any time we pleased. I tossed it across the table to Giles, who was as usual proving himself a valiant trencherman.

"Thank goodness!" he ejaculated. "What time shall we start?"

I despatched a waiter for a time table, and when I received it turned to the page showing the Hampton Court line.

"There is a train at half-past ten," I said. "If we hurry we ought to be able to catch that."

"Then let's catch it by all means," was his answer.

Having made myself presentable, I descended to the hall, to find a telegram for

me in the letter rack. It was an answer to the cablegram I had despatched to Australia, and the reply was to the effect that the firm knew no squatter of the name I mentioned.

"I thought as much," I said to myself, as I placed the message in my pocket-book. "Those Station photographs must have been purchased with the sole intention of allaying any suspicions I might have."

Presently Giles made his appearance, and jumping into a cab we drove off to Waterloo.

It was a bright, cold morning, with a touch of frost in the air. I think we were both nervous about the coming interview, though we tried not to let each other see it. For this reason we talked of old days, and of the many adventures we had gone through together.

At last we reached Hampton Court, and passed out of the station in the direction of Mrs. Jackson's house. The old lady received us herself in the drawing room. I presented Miss Angela's brother, Sir Giles Carbridge, to her.

"I should have known that you were her brother by your likeness to her," she observed. "I fear you will find her changed since

you last saw her, although she is decidedly better. The doctor seems very hopeful about her."

"Thank Heaven for that," said Giles. "And now, may I see her, Mrs. Jackson?"

"Yes, I will tell her," replied the old lady, and left the room.

"Heart up, old fellow," I said, "all will come right yet. But don't be disappointed if she does not know you at first."

"I'm not a child," he said savagely.

We had no time to say more, for the door opened and Miss Angela entered.

I was for going out and leaving them alone, but Giles stopped me with an imperious wave of his hand. Then he went forward to greet his sister.

"Angela, my darling, are you glad to see me?"

He took her in his arms and kissed her. A warm flush suffused her face, and she drew herself away from him.

"Don't you remember me?" he asked, and there was a note of pain in his voice. "I am your brother, Giles—the brother who used to play with you at Carbridge, who taught you to ride your first pony, and who loved you so dearly."

But she only shook her head, and swept her hand across her brow.

"I cannot remember," she said.

I knew what pain it was causing him, but it was impossible to do anything to help. Strangely enough, she remembered me and addressed me by my name, but whether she connected me in any way with what happened before she had arrived at Acacia Villa, is more than I can say.

An idea occurred to me, and I mentioned it to Mrs. Jackson. I had noticed that she was always in better spirits when in the open air. Perhaps, if we were to take a stroll, it might do her good on this occasion.

"Go by all means," said the old lady. "Angela, dear, put on your things and take a little walk with your brother and Mr. Bramwell."

She went off at once, and in a few minutes returned in her out-of-doors attire.

We set off along the towing path, past the racecourse, and away towards Sunbury Lock. At first she was inclined to be reserved, but after a while she talked a little more freely. Once her brother touched on the subject of their life as children. But

once more it was plain that she did not understand to what he referred. At last it was time for us to turn back, and we accordingly retraced our steps.

As we approached Molesey Lock a string of barges, hauled by a tug, were waiting to enter. The lock was filling fast, and Giles, who was interested, suggested that we should stay and see them pass through. We accordingly walked down to the edge of the lock and waited. Even to this day I can scarcely bear to think of what happened then. Whether she slipped, or whether the swirling water made her giddy, it is impossible to say. I only know that, with a cry, she fell forward and disappeared beneath the surface.

Almost before I knew what I was doing, my coat and hat were off, and I had dived in after her. Strong swimmer though I am, it was almost impossible to do anything in that eddying rush of water. At last I had to come to the surface for breath. Then down I went again. At last I felt something, and seizing it rose with it once more. My strength was nearly gone, but I had caught her securely by the back of her dress, and raised her head above water. A couple of

strokes brought me to the edge of the lock, which was now full.

“Take her,” I managed to say, and I saw Giles stoop and pull her out. Then I felt myself sinking, and lost consciousness.

CHAPTER XIII

WHEN I came to my senses I found myself in bed in a comfortable room with Giles sitting beside me. He saw that I was conscious once more and gave me something warm to drink.

"What's the matter?" I found strength to ask.

"Don't you ask questions," he replied. "What you have got to do is to hold your tongue until further orders."

I suppose I must have dozed off again, for I remember nothing more until I was awakened by the closing of a door. I opened my eyes to discover Giles and an elderly gentleman with grey whiskers and a kindly face looking down at me. The latter felt my pulse.

"He'll do," he observed. "Feel better, don't you?"

"Much better," I answered. "But what's been the matter?"

“You went into the lock after my sister,” replied Giles; “and saved her life. At the same time you came very near losing your own.”

“And how is she?” I asked.

“Doing as well as can be expected under the circumstances,” the doctor replied. “She has naturally had a great shock, but we cannot say for certain that it may not prove a blessing in disguise. Now you must keep quiet.”

“But I am as strong as ever I was,” I objected. “There is no need for me to stay in bed. It was only a bit of a ducking; I shall get up.”

“Then you will have to get up as you are,” replied Giles. “For you have got no clothes to wear. They are being dried.”

In that case there was nothing for it but for me to remain where I was. As it happened I did not get up until the following morning, by which time I was quite myself again, and my clothes were quite dry.

“How do you feel, old fellow?” asked Giles, who had stayed the night at the nearest hotel, but had been invited for breakfast by Mrs. Jackson.

“A bit shaky on my pins,” I replied; “otherwise as fit as a fiddle.”

"I don't know how to thank you for what you did yesterday," he began. "Had it not been for your promptness my sister would not be alive now. This is the second time you have saved her from death, and I owe you a debt of gratitude which I shall never be able to repay."

"Nonsense," I replied. "Anybody else would have done the same. Let's be thankful that it has ended as it has."

"Amen to that," he replied.

When I was dressed I went downstairs to the dining-room, where I found Mrs. Jackson busying herself with the breakfast table. She came to greet me with motherly interest.

"Oh, Mr. Bramwell," she said, "how thankful I am that you are better, nor can I say how much I admired your bravery yesterday."

I was getting a little tired of all this sort of thing, but of course I could not tell her so.

"Sir Giles has gone up to see his sister and will be down in a few moments."

After breakfast the doctor arrived and went upstairs. Giles and I waited in the dining-room for him to come downstairs and give us his report. That he had good news for us was evident from the moment that he

entered the room. Giles asked him for news.

"She is doing excellently," he replied. "I could not wish anything better. As I told you yesterday, I thought it very possible that the shock might prove a blessing in disguise. I repeat it."

"What do you mean?" we asked simultaneously.

"I mean that I think, mind I only say I think, that it may be the means of restoring her memory to her. It is not unfrequently the case."

I saw Giles' mouth twitch on hearing this, and I know that, so far as I was concerned, there was a lump in my throat that seemed as if it would choke me.

"Of course," the doctor said, "you must not build upon it; but we will hope for for the best. She must have perfect rest and quiet for a few days, and must not be excited in any shape or form."

He then enquired after my health, and, finding that I had recovered, took his departure, promising to look in during the day.

"Jack, if only this proved to be true," said my companion when he had gone.

A few minutes later Mrs. Jackson entered the room. There were tears in her eyes.

"You have heard?" she said.

We informed her that we had.

"I pray that it may be true," she continued. "Even in this short time I have learned to love her like my own daughter."

"And the time will come when I hope she will repay you," said her brother.

"We will not talk of repayment," replied the old lady, and then begging us to excuse her, left us to return to the sick room.

"Now, Jack, what are we going to do?" asked my friend. "We had better return to town I think, for it is quite certain that we can't stay here."

"I agree with you," I answered. "The sooner we get away the better. Mrs. Jackson will let us know how she progresses."

When the old lady returned to us we informed her of our decision, and thanked her most warmly for all she had done. Then we took our departure, and in due course reached the hotel. How we were going to put in the rest of the day neither of us seemed to know. I did not feel equal to much running about, and I could not induce Giles to leave me and go off on his own account. So to compromise matters we adjourned to the smoking-room to read the papers and consume tobacco.

When we had been there half-an-hour or so I went up to my room to find a letter that I had received from a well-known dealer in pearls, whose offices were in Hatton Garden. But to my astonishment I could not find it. I searched my trunk and the pockets of all my clothes, my letter case and every place I could think of, but without success. It was nowhere to be found. It was not likely that it had been stolen, for it would have been of no use to anyone else, being written in such a way that, to anyone who was not in the secret, it would have been unintelligible. The search must have lasted nearly half-an-hour, and it was only by chance that I discovered it inside a novel, which I then remembered to have been reading at the time that I received it. I locked the trunk and went downstairs again.

As I approached the smoking-room door I heard the sound of voices and paused before entering. To my horror one was the voice of Armitage, the other belonged to Giles. From the way in which they spoke it was evident that they were on the best of terms. Here was a nice position for me to be placed in. What on earth was I to do? I could not tell Giles the truth, that I had the best

of reasons for believing that this man was the individual who had attempted to murder his sister. Nor could I say anything to the other on the subject. It was as difficult a position as anyone could well be placed in. However, there was nothing for it but to put a good face on it and take other steps later. I therefore pushed open the door and entered.

"Ah, my dear Bramwell," said the visitor, rising from his chair, "I was half afraid I should not see you, but thought I would look in on the chance of doing so. I congratulate you most heartily on your heroism yesterday, of which there are excellent accounts in the morning papers. I am sure you deserve all the praise they give you."

"Confound the papers," I said. "I was afraid that was what would happen. You can't fall down in the street without having the fact chronicled."

Then seeing that something was expected of me, I said to Giles, "You know Mr. Armitage?"

"I took the liberty of introducing myself," said Armitage. "The waiter was looking for you, and your friend was good enough to tell me that you had gone upstairs, but that you would not be long."

Then it struck me I would give him something to bite on and see how he took it.

“Let me make you known to each other—Mr. Armitage of Sydney, Sir Giles Carbridge.”

The start that he gave showed how great his surprise was.

Angela Carbridge's brother was probably the last person he either desired or expected to meet. However, as usual, he was equal to the occasion; but I noticed that he did not shake hands. Perhaps even he thought that would be going a little too far. I have often discovered that the greatest rogues have consciences in some things. Armitage's could not have been overworked.

After a while Giles, who was hospitality itself, ordered champagne. When the first bottle was finished I begged to be excused, for my head was not yet altogether recovered from the sousing I had had on the previous day. The others, however, did full justice, and I was sorry, but not surprised, to see a third make its appearance. I knew Giles of old and was aware that he owned a head like a teak baulk. It did not matter how much wine he might drink, he was never the worse for it. It was otherwise with Armitage.

Possibly he had had some before leaving his hotel. At any rate what he took now had clearly affected him, yet did not lead him to do or say anything that would be likely to lead us to suspect him of being concerned in the mystery of the brig. He talked mainly of Australia, with the ease and familiarity of a man who has spent a lifetime there. That he *had* been in the Colony at some time or another I did not for a moment doubt, but when I listened to his tales of his Stations, remembered the photographs he had shown me in his sitting-room, and thought of the telegram that I carried in my letter case, I could have laughed aloud. If only he had known. I offered him a cigar, and before he had half smoked it he had insisted upon ordering another bottle. For Giles' sake I would have tried to stop it, but I knew him too well of old to venture upon such a thing. There's an old South Sea maxim to the effect that a man's a fool who comes between another man and his drink. And when you come to think of it, there is a good deal of truth in it after all. By the time they had finished that one, Armitage, I could see, was ready for anything. He invited us to lunch with him and seemed inclined

to make himself nasty because we declared we were unable to do so.

“Well, if you won’t, you won’t,” he said, “so I must be going. “Good-bye, Sir Giles, I shall hope to have the pleasure of meeting you on another occasion. Good-bye, my dear Bramwell. You should apply for the Royal Humane Society’s Medal.”

He then took himself off to leave me boiling over with rage. If I hadn’t known his condition I should have said something to him that I doubt if he would have appreciated. Giles laughed.

“I like your friend,” he said. “He has a marvellous idea of his own importance, but he doesn’t seem able to stand his liquor.”

“I never want to see the fellow again,” I growled. “Some day I’ll tell you all I know of him, and you shall judge for yourself. A more out-and-out scoundrel doesn’t walk this earth.”

“And yet you seemed on friendly enough terms with him just now,” Giles persisted.

“Because I am playing a game of my own, that’s all,” I replied. “That’s the long and short of it. However, don’t let’s talk any more about him. I don’t think we shall see anything more of him to-day.”

But I was mistaken as you shall presently hear.

During the afternoon we went for a walk as far as Hampstead Heath. It was a glorious winter's afternoon, and just the very day for a tramp. Along the Tottenham Court Road and Camden Town High Street, then over Haverstock Hill, and so on to The Heath. On the way we talked of things of which the folk around us knew nothing, of lovely islands peeping up out of bright blue seas, of surfs breaking on coral reefs, of strange characters we had known, and still stranger sights that we had witnessed. Once Giles stopped in his walk and began to laugh. I wondered whether the effect of the champagne had still got possession of him, so I asked him what was the matter with him.

"I was just thinking," he said, "what a funny thing it is that you and I should be walking through London like this, when, less than six months ago, we were beating up for Honolulu, after as queer a cruise as the biggest novelist could imagine. It's a queer world when you come to think of it."

"Folk may talk of the long arm of coincidence, but just look at our case. I meet you quite by chance, and you ask me to join you

as mate of your schooner. I leave you to come home for a holiday, and rescue a lady in mid-Atlantic, who, of all women in the world, turns out to be your sister. I defy anybody to beat that."

"No, it certainly is wonderful."

On reaching The Heath we sat down on a bench and relit our pipes. For some time we talked on trivial subjects, each knowing what was in the other's mind, but neither knowing quite how to begin. At last Giles broached the subject by saying "Look here, Jack, I tell you without any more beating about the bush, that by hook or crook, we have got to find those fellows who murdered that man, and who very nearly did the same for my sister. As you know I am a fairly wealthy man, as wealth goes now-a-days, but if it costs me all I've got, and if I have to be a poor man for the rest of my days, I'm going to hunt those brutes down. You feel the same way about it yourself, don't you?"

"Of course I do, but I don't think the frost will hold. Even if it did, it's a bit too far to go."

He stared at me in complete astonishment. I haven't the least doubt but that he thought I had gone off my head.

"Are you mad?" he asked.

"Hush," I said under my breath; "there's a man in the bushes behind us, and I know who he is. Bet me what that bush is on the left."

He pointed in the direction I had indicated.

"I'll bet you a sovereign," he said, "that you can't tell me what that bush is over there?"

"Wild rose," I answered promptly.

"Wild rose your grandmother!" he replied. "It's a blackberry."

"All right, I'll take you for a sovereign."

And getting up I strolled towards it. Then slipping round the patch of bushes behind the seat, I knelt down, caught the eavesdropper by one of his ankles and pulled him out. I did it so quickly that he had no time to save himself. I rolled him over to have a look at his face, and found to my astonishment that he was none other than the little Jew who had followed me to Hampton Court. Lifting him up by the scruff of his neck, I marched him round to where Giles was seated.

"What do you think of this for a specimen?" I asked, giving him a shake up as I did so. "You may be bound he has been dogging our steps since we left town. It's not the

first time he has done it for me. You followed me down to Hampton Court. Didn't you?"

"No, sir. You must have been mistaken, sir," the cur whined. "I've never been to 'Ampton Court in my life, sir. I wouldn't tell yer a lie, not for anything."

"What's the best thing to do with him do you think?" I asked Giles. "Give him a thrashing, or throw him into the nearest pond?"

"Oh, please, gentlemen both, don't hurt me. I never meant no 'arm."

"What were you doing in these bushes, then?"

"Taking a bit of a doss, sir; being tired of walking, so to speak," was his reply.

"Tie his hands and feet and throw him into the bushes to remain there until somebody comes to find him. That's what I should recommend. It's going to snow to-night and he'll be dead before morning."

On hearing this the fellow howled outright, and implored us to let him go.

At last Giles appeared to make up his mind.

"Let the beast go," he said; "we don't war with worms. But, hark'ee, my man, understand this, if you dare to follow us again

I'll man-haul you till there's nothing left of you. Remember that. Now clear out."

He was just going when I called him back.

"You can tell Mr. Armitage what has been said to you," I remarked. "Perhaps he will give you another talking to like he did the other day. Then you will have caught it on both sides. Now go!"

He stood not on the order of his going but he went, being doubtless very thankful to have got off so cheaply.

"What did you mean by that about Armitage?" asked Giles when he had gone. "What had he got to do with that rascal?"

"Well, that's a long story," I replied, "and if you don't mind, I'll postpone the telling of it until I have gleaned one or two more facts. I told you this morning that the fellow was a thorough-paced scoundrel, and you have had just one good proof of it this afternoon. I'll give you more before I have done. Now, I suppose, we had better be getting back. It will be dark before long."

We accordingly set off on our homeward walk, and reached our hotel just about six o'clock. Having dressed for dinner I went down to the smoking-room where I found

Giles with an evening paper in his hand in a state of great excitement. I was becoming used to surprises, but I was in for one now and no mistake.

“I say, Jack,” he cried, “here’s a nice kettle of fish. Just listen to this. ‘Serious accident in the Strand.’ ”

This morning, at about mid-day, a gentleman whom it has been discovered was an Australian millionaire, named Edward Armitage, and who was a resident at the Imperial Hotel, was crossing the street when he was knocked down by a passing bus, the left-hand wheels of which passed over his chest, causing injuries which it is feared must inevitably prove fatal. An ambulance was procured, and the sufferer conveyed with as little delay as possible to the Charing Cross Hospital, where he now lies.

For a moment I could scarcely believe that I heard aright. It seemed impossible that the man whom we had seen that morning so full of health and vigour should now be lying a helpless mass in a hospital ward. Villain as he was, such a fate seemed too terrible.

I can assure you that evening we sat down to dinner with but poor appetites. We had

intended going to a music hall that evening in order to try and cheer ourselves up, but under the circumstances we decided not to do so, but adjourned to the billiard-room where we played a couple of hundred up, and having voted it a dreary amusement, retreated to the smoking-room to offer a libation to the Goddess Nicotine.

About half-past nine a servant entered with a note upon a salver. This he brought to me. The writing was quite unknown to me. On opening it I found that it was from the house surgeon of the Charing Cross Hospital, and informed me that Armitage was sinking fast, and that he had expressed a desire to see me. If I were willing to comply with his request I should lose no time in reaching the hospital, otherwise I should be too late. I handed the letter to Giles.

“What are you going to do?” he asked, looking searchingly at me.

“Go and see him,” I replied. “I couldn’t very well do anything else.”

“Well, go on,” he said, “and good luck go with you. I shall sit up until you come back.”

Five minutes later I was on my way, through the pitiless, pouring rain, to the hospital.

The house surgeon, a pleasant, affable young fellow, received me.

“You haven’t come any too soon,” he replied in answer to my query as to his patient’s condition. “I give him about an hour. Come along, and I’ll take you to him.”

I followed him to the ward where the dying man lay.

CHAPTER XIV

EVERYONE who has ever entered the Accident Ward of a large Hospital knows the sickening feeling of dread that is experienced as one approaches the sufferer's bed. Surely there are few people in this world of ours so callous as to be able to watch a fellow-creature's sufferings unmoved. For my part, I know that I cannot, and yet probably I have seen more of the hard-hearted business side of life than most people.

"This way," said the house surgeon, and led me down the centre of the room to a bed at the further end, hidden from the rest of the room by a screen. As we approached it, a silent-footed nurse emerged.

"How does he seem now, Nurse," asked the doctor in a whisper.

"Sinking fast, sir," the woman replied. "I don't think he'll last much longer."

The other nodded and signed to me to follow him. We went behind the screen and there, in a narrow bed, lay the man who had done his best to kill me, and yet who, in his dying moments, desired to see me. His black hair and dark eyes stood out in vivid contrast to the pallor of his complexion. One of the small hands, of which I knew he was so vain, lay upon the coverlet.

"Here is Mr. Bramwell to see you," said the doctor in a low voice. "You expressed a wish that he should come."

"Yes, I want to see him," he answered. "I want to talk to him before it is too late. Sit down, Bramwell. They tell me there isn't much time, so we must make the most of it. I have a good long story to tell you."

"Well, I'll leave you alone together," said the doctor. "The nurse will be in hearing if he should want anything."

He then departed and I seated myself by the bedside. For upwards of a minute he did not speak. Then, turning his great dark eyes on me, he said—"Bramwell, do you know that I intended to kill you, if I could."

"Yes, I know it," I answered. "But why refer to that now?"

"Because I must. It bears on what I've got to say to you. I meant to do it, only you were one too many for me. It was I who set those two fellows on to you in Florence."

"I know it," I replied.

"How on earth did you know it?" he asked, with as much surprise as he was capable of showing under such circumstances.

"Because I found your message in the man's pocket."

"And I sent two of the best men I knew," he added regretfully. "However, it's no use grizzling over that now, so we'll let it go. If I ask you a straightforward question, as a dying man, will you answer me?"

"If it's anything that I feel I can answer you, I will do so willingly," I answered. "What is it?"

"Are you going to marry Angela Carbridge?"

"Yes, I can answer that," I replied. "I shall do so if she will have me. But not while she remains in the state she is in now. But why do you ask the question?"

"Because it was my belief that you were trying to do so that made me try to kill you; that and another reason, which I will tell you directly."

He paused for a few minutes, as if to recover his strength.

"This talking takes it out of me," he said.

"Then why go on with it?" I asked, for the man's condition was pitiable. I could see that he was suffering agonies. Great beads of perspiration stood upon his brow, the sweat of approaching dissolution.

"But look here, Bramwell," he went on after a while, "I will say this for you. You have beaten me at my own game, and if I can't have her there's no one else I would prefer more than yourself. At least you're a man. I suppose you want to know the story of that brig, don't you?"

I was compelled to admit that I did. Who could desire to know it more than I should?

"You think that I had some hand in the murder of that man you found upon the deck. And you'd be right. I *did* have a hand in it, and it served him right, for the traitorous dog he was. Give me time and I will tell you the story."

In my own mind I didn't think he'd live to get through it, but I promised to listen.

"I first met Angela Carbridge when she was a student at Canti Studio in Florence. I

loved her from the first moment I set eyes on her. I thought she loved me, but I'll be honest enough in my last hour to say that I found myself mistaken. She cared for nothing but her Art. However, I persevered, growing every day to love her more. She treated me as a friend, because she was an innocent girl and did not know the sort of man I was. Then Manuel Garcia, the man you found pinned upon the deck of the brig appeared upon the scene, and professed to be my friend. He offered to help me to win her affections, and instead of doing that he endeavoured to turn them towards himself. Ugly as he was, that man had an extraordinary control over women. It was as if they could not resist him. He came to me and told me that he was sure she loved me, for she had dropped a hint that seemed to imply as much. That night she fled from Florence with him, against her will I'll swear, for no woman could have loved a man like that. His plans had been carefully laid. He had chartered a brig in Genoa, and in it they set sail together for South America. When the news reached me that she was gone, I was like a madman. I have done some pretty bad things in my life, few men worse I suppose, but what I was going to do now outshone them all. Remember I believed her to

be false to me, as he had been. As you may have guessed I am a rich man, though how I made it you had better not enquire too closely. I chartered a steam yacht, manned her with a crew of my own, who I knew would stick at nothing if they were well paid for it, and set off in pursuit. A constant watch was kept, and as I knew the course they would be likely to steer, I knew there was every chance of my catching them. She lay becalmed, and we steamed up quite close to her and hailed her to say that we were sending a boat. The rest you can guess."

"But the officers and crew?" I faltered. "What became of them?"

"Oh, they showed fight, and the rest you can guess."

The cold-blooded way in which he said it was enough to curdle one's blood.

"We didn't want any witnesses," he said.

"But the girl, Miss Angela? Do you mean to tell me that you left her to drown or starve?"

"She was false to me," he muttered sullenly. "She defied me and vowed that after all she had been through on that ship she would never go in another one. She declared that she would sooner die."

I could stand no more of it, and rose to leave. Had I not known that he was a dying man, I should have struck him across the mouth for the words he had spoken. He looked up at me like an animal in pain.

“I know what is passing in your mind,” he murmured. “But I’ll swear before the God I am about to meet that you are wrong. She is as pure and innocent to-day as she was at twelve years old.”

“And yet you would have killed her?”

“It was the devil inside me. I steamed away, dropped two or three men at Las Palmas, and that was how I came to hear that you had picked the brig up, and had taken charge of her, dropped two more at Gibraltar, and then steamed on to Naples where I gave up the yacht, and hastened across the Continent to England to meet you. I was at Plymouth when you arrived, I travelled up in the same train to London that you did; I missed you, however, at Waterloo. But after some time I found out where you were staying, and the rest you know. If only you knew how I hated you. First, because you had rescued her, and second, because I feared you would discover my share in the secret of the brig. That was why I wanted to kill you.”

He shut his eyes as if he could say no more. Thinking the end was close at hand I stepped softly outside and beckoned to the nurse. She hastened in and leant over him, then crept quietly out and sent a messenger for the house surgeon. It was not long before he put in an appearance. He felt his pulse, and shook his head. I stood at the foot of the bed, the nurse beside me. In silence we waited for the end to come.

It was some time, however, before it did. Then he opened his eyes and said something in a foreign tongue which I could not understand. After that, in less than five minutes, all was over. The doctor and I left the ward together.

“Come into my room for a moment, won’t you?” he said. “I think, after what you have been through upstairs, a whisky and soda will do you no harm.”

I can assure you that I felt it would not, and I accordingly followed him to his own private sanctum. I asked what would be done about the funeral arrangements for the man who had just died. It appeared that Armitage, or whatever his real name may have been, had settled everything himself.

Then thanking the doctor for his kindness, I returned to my hotel to find Giles eagerly awaiting my coming. I told him all that had happened.

"Poor beggar," he said, "I wonder if he really was as bad as you seem to imply."

For the life of me I did not know how to reply. If I told him that the dead man was the person who had tried to kill his sister, it would look as if I had waited until the man was out of the way before speaking against him. In other words, to use a slang expression, I was going behind his back. On the other hand, if I did not tell him, he would continue to harp on his desire for revenge, and knowing him as I did, I felt morally sure he would never rest until he had had it. I fancy now you will see something of the quandary I was placed in.

"Let us hope not," I answered fervently. "He's dead, so let him sleep in peace."

Giles and I attended his funeral, and we were the only followers. With the sound of the shovelled-in earth ringing in our ears we left the cemetery and drove back to the Strand. Such was the end of Edward Armitage, who might have done great things, but preferred to do small ones.

And now let me turn to a happier page of my life's history.

Three weeks had gone by since the event I have just recorded. With every day Miss Angela had been steadily gaining ground and, as her bodily health improved, so her mind seemed to be regaining its old vigour. Still, however, the memory of those terrible days, and all that had gone before, was a blank to her. She knew Giles as a friend like myself, but not as a brother. Two or three times a week we took long walks—Miss Angela, Miss Janet, Giles and myself. We walked to Esher, to Kingston, where they did their shopping, through Bushey Park, and on one memorable occasion, well-nigh to Cobham. I say memorable occasion, because it was in the evening of that day that Giles suggested that we should abandon hotel life and take a house near Molesey Lock. You will not wonder that I at once closed with his suggestion, and the following week, with the assistance of the ladies, we were busily engaged furnishing. We were both well off, and the house was to be perfection as far as bachelor requirements were concerned. It was then that I was struck with the delicacy of taste possessed by the woman I loved, and when I noticed what

pleasure it gave her, I felt as if, for my part, I could go on furnishing till Doomsday. This I have since discovered is common enough with unmarried men; after marriage they think differently.

Then came the hunting for servants, the question of the cook who drank, and of the other who made things unpleasant in the kitchen.

"The truth of the whole thing is," said Giles, "we're two miserable bachelors, and they take advantage of us. We ought to be married."

I'd had my suspicions for some time past, but being a prudent man, had not mentioned the fact.

"Well, perhaps we ought. And who have you thought of taking to wife?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, I haven't given much thought to the matter."

This was not the truth, and he knew it.

Then winter went out and spring came in, the leaves made their appearance on the trees, and the boatmen along the river were hard at work preparing for the coming season.

One evening, the night of full moon, I

remember, we four went for a walk along the towing path. It was a night upon which it was a shame to remain in-doors. A soft wind sighed among the rushes, as if murmuring a message for the river to carry to the sea. The others had gone on ahead, but we found a rustic seat and sat down upon it. I talked to her of a new picture she was engaged upon, and which we were all desirous she should send in to the Academy. In it she had surpassed any work I had yet seen of hers. There was a depth of poetry, a beauty of colouring, and a fertility of imagination that was remarkable in one so young.

“Ah!” I said, “how proud Canti would be of you, could he but see it.”

She sprang to her feet, quivering in every limb. In the moonlight I could see the expression on her face. It was like the face of one returning to life from death. Then the quivering ceased, and she stood like one turned to stone, rigid as marble, looking straight before her.

“Angela,” I cried, forgetting the Miss in my anxiety; “what is the matter? For Heaven’s sake tell me.”

But she did not answer. Again I asked,

and again she did not reply. Then she threw up her hands to her face. "What is it, what is it?" she cried.

Thinking she was going to fall, I ran forward and caught her in my arms.

"Something is cracking in my head," she moaned. "Oh! help me—help me!"

I did not know what to do. But fortunately, at that moment, Miss Janet and Giles turned the corner and came towards us. What they must have thought of the curious position in which they found us, I cannot tell. The truth was, I was too much upset to think of anything.

"Quickly," I cried; "something terrible has happened."

"What is the matter, dear?" enquired Miss Janet.

"The blood, the blood!" she cried. "Look at the blood upon the deck!"

Then a fit of sobbing took possession of her. I half led, half carried her to the bench upon which we had been sitting, while Giles went to the river's bank and dipped his handkerchief in. With that we bathed her temples.

After a while she grew calmer, and we led her home. Mrs. Jackson met us in the

hall, and with a frightened look upon her face asked what was the matter. We informed her that she had not been well, and then the ladies between them escorted her to her room. Giles and I passed into the dining room, where I gave him an account of what had happened.

"It means that her memory is waking," he said. "The fact that she remembers her old painting master proves that. Now, let's get home, they don't want us here any more to-night."

We left a message with the servant, and went back to our own abode. Giles who, though anxious, did not appear as depressed by his sister's condition as I thought he might have been, mixed two glasses of toddy and handed one to me.

"I am going to give you a toast, Jack, my boy," he said.

"What is it?" I enquired.

"A health to Miss Janet."

Though I could very well guess, I asked for an explanation.

"Well, I give it to you now," he replied, "because you won't have many more opportunities of drinking it."

"Good gracious—and why not?"

“For the simple reason that she has consented to-night to become Lady Carbridge.”

“I wish you joy, with all my heart,” I cried. “She is a noble girl, and will make you a noble wife.”

“I knew you’d say so, and I am proud to have won her.”

Not a wink of sleep did I get that night. That despairing cry on the river bank, and the piteous look upon her face haunted me until daybreak. But there were brighter times ahead.

We were in the middle of breakfast when our front door was opened without ceremony, and Miss Janet, regardless of the conventionalities, burst in upon us.

“Giles, Giles,” she cried, “her memory has come back. Between two and three o’clock this morning she started up in bed and asked me where she was. She thought she had been dreaming. She spoke of her childhood, of her student days in Florence, and of the awful things that happened to her on board that ship. Oh! I am so thankful. The doctor has been to see her, and of course like every doctor says that it is exactly what he thought would happen. Mother is wild with joy.”

"We will come round at once," said her lover.

But she would not permit it.

"Doctor Sledgewick says she is to be kept perfectly quiet, otherwise there may be a relapse. As soon as she is well enough to travel she is to go away, say to the South of France."

"We'll all go," cried the enthusiastic lover. "Your mother, yourself, Angela, Jack here, and your obedient, humble servant."

.

Six months have passed, and Angela's memory is as perfect as ever it was. To my thinking she is more beautiful than ever she was, but she says that I am prejudiced. As we are to be married next Thursday, it is possible that may be so, though I am not prepared to admit it. Giles and Janet are to take upon themselves the bonds of wedlock at the same time, and afterwards we are to live near them. The schooner has been sold, and for some reason we never talk very much about her. Mrs. Jackson, dear old lady, is to spend her life in visits

to the two houses, because, as we all say, we cannot do without her. There is one place, however, that neither my wife nor I ever intend to visit, and that place is Florence.

THE END



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